OLD!

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The co-founder of Graftgold on early classics and hit arcade conversions

NINJA GAIDEN
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT WAS THE LAST 8-BIT GAME YOU BOUGHT?



DARRAN JONES

It would have been *Power Strike II* on the Master System. When I see how much it now goes for I wish I kept it.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Far too many board games
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

Blimey, that's a toughie. I think it was *The Addams Family* for my Amstrad. I picked it up after playing an *Amstrad Action* demo and being bowled over by the game's graphics.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Sega Rally Online Arcade
Favourite game of all time:
Sega Rally Online Arcade



JASON KELK

The last game I purchased over the counter was probably *Walkerz* on the C64, unless indie titles don't count, in which case it was *Alien 3*.
Expertise:
All things homebrew-related
Currently playing:
Action Biker (C64)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



PAUL DRURY

Turrican 2 in 1991. I'd just come home after finishing at university and was dusting off my C64 after several years of neglect. I was amazed at the tricks the old girl still had.
Expertise:
Cosplay
Currently playing:
Spacewar!
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



MARTYN CARROLL

Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge for the Spectrum. I played it on my mate's Amiga and hoped that the ZX version would be okay. It was, but my Speccy's time was up.
Expertise:
8-bits and bobs
Currently playing:
WipEout Pulse
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DAVIES

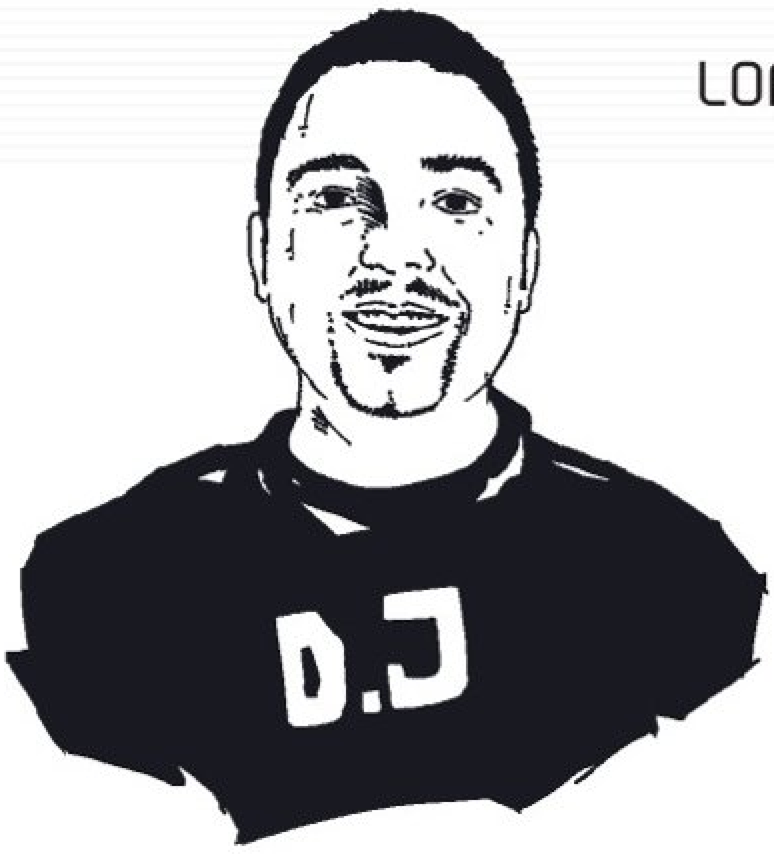
That would have been NES *Kirby*. Brilliant!
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo: Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



DAVID CROOKES

Prehistorik 2. With its amazing graphics and a great review in *Amstrad Action* I remember being very eager to get home with this one.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
L.A. Noire
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

LOADING...



The other day I found myself in one of those awkward conversations where somebody asked me what I do for a job. I absolutely adore working on Retro Gamer, but past experience has taught me that when you mention that you're the editor of a gaming magazine, the response is a sneer with a reply along the lines of: "Oh, so all you really do is play games all day. That's not a proper job."

So I mentioned how I was the editor of **Retro Gamer**, a magazine dedicated to the consoles and computers of yesteryear, and awaited the backlash. It never came. Instead this guy, who a few minutes earlier was a complete stranger waiting in line with me at Tesco until we struck up a conversation about the copy of *L.A. Noire* he was buying, told me how it was one of his favourite magazines, how he adored the recent *Zelda* cover and that he was excitedly waiting for our 100th issue.

It's always nice when someone compliments something you genuinely enjoy making, and even more so when it comes out of the blue. Creating **Retro Gamer** is a passion, and when people like James come along, it makes an already great experience even better.

Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 92 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…







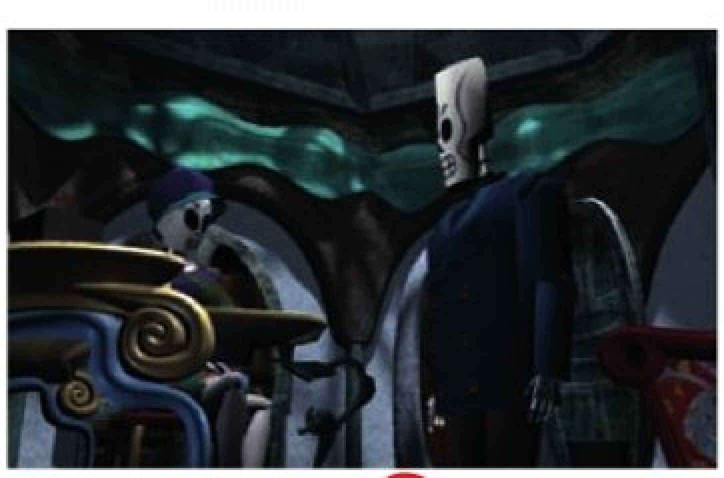
"It represents a niche genre hitting its artistic peak"

Samuel Roberts

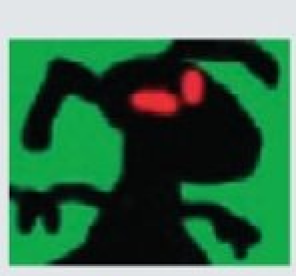




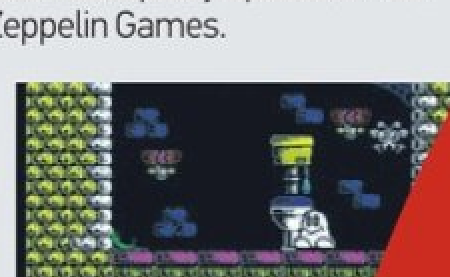




retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





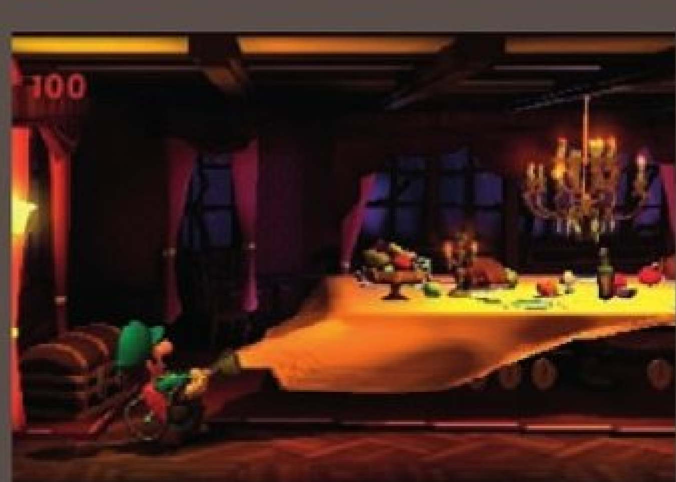
retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> E3 turned out to be a good time for retro gamers, with lots of classic compilations getting announced. Nintendo also had a good showing thanks to plenty of core franchises for the 3Ds, and let's not forget its interesting new console (even if we only really saw the controller).

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THE 3D DIFFERENCE

NINTENDO PREPARES TO UNLEASH A WAVE OF 3DS GAMES

Well, it's finally out of the bag. After weeks of speculation in the run-up to E3, Nintendo's Project Café was finally unveiled as the Wii U. While the console itself was shrouded in secrecy (so much so that, at one stage, we thought the controller was the actual machine), its innovative controller was proudly shown off. Utilising a touch screen interface and looking a lot like a cross between a tablet and a controller, it's an interesting device that shows plenty of potential. The only downside was that, aside from a gorgeous tech demo of *Zelda*, a brief mention of a crossover *Super Smash Bros.* game and a brief showreel of up-and-coming third-party titles, there was nothing else to see.

If Nintendo was keeping quiet about its first-party games for the Wii U, it wasn't afraid to reveal some more information on the many 3DS titles that were planned for the year's end. While many of them were showcased at last year's show, there was more than enough new information about them to maintain our excitement.

Indeed, the beginning of the show was the perfect opportunity for Nintendo to announce its plans for *The Legend Of Zelda* franchise, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Ably backed by an orchestra and showing videos of the recently released *Ocarina Of Time 3D*, Shigeru Miyamoto thanked gamers for supporting the franchise and went on to announce the release of *Link's Awakening* on the 3DS's Virtual Console, more juicy coverage of *Skyward Sword*, and that the multiplayer handheld game *Four Swords* will be available free of charge on DSiWare later this year (we're guessing it will be the original GBA version and not the superior GameCube update).

Then it was on to the 3DS games, and Nintendo didn't disappoint. By far the most exciting news was the reveal of a brand new *Luigi's Mansion* game. We've already mentioned in a previous Future Classic that the original game was always considered as a 3D title for the GameCube, so it was great to see Nintendo returning to the franchise.

> **"By far the most exciting news was the reveal of a brand new Luigi's Mansion game"**

While little information was available, Nintendo did confirm that it would be much bigger than the previous game and would features additional mansions to explore. While we had no problems with the





» [3DS] Nintendo always likes to evolve the series, but will flying and underwater sections be a step too far?

* GO DEEPER

>> ***Super Mario* features the Tanooki Suit, which was last used in *Super Mario Bros. 3*.**

>> **The Virtual Console was launched to tie-in with Nintendo's show, and came with a free copy of *Excitebike 3D*.**

>> **The last full *Kid Icarus* game was *Kid Icarus: Of Myths And Monsters*, meaning Pit has been away for 20 long years.**


» [3DS] *Super Mario* is already looking excellent.

streamlined size of the original GameCube game, it was certainly an issue for many, so it's good to see Nintendo responding to feedback. The short reel we saw suggested all the quirky gameplay and humour of the original, so we're now desperately awaiting a proper hands-on.

Kirby Mass Attack was another pleasant surprise that came out of nowhere, and is a world away from previous platform-based *Kirby* fare. Taking on the form of an RTS, with a few dashes of *Mario Vs. Donkey Kong* for good measure, *Mass Attack* sees you taking on a swarm of ten Kirbys, using the stylus to solve a number of puzzles and dodge hazards as you make your way through each stage. Needless to say, being a *Kirby* title you can expect lots of minigames as well. Interestingly, *Kirby Mass Attack* is a DS game, showing that Nintendo isn't prepared to abandon the popular machine in favour of its 3D cousin just yet.

Kid Icarus: Uprising had more focus as it prepares for its release later this year, and, while we still can't decide on the on-foot levels, the flying sections continue to astound us. Nintendo also revealed a brand new multiplayer mode that enables players to battle each other online. The games are team-based and feature an interesting mechanic that sees the last defeated player of one team being resurrected as Angel Pit. If the other team can track him down and defeat him, they then win the match.


» [3DS] We don't care for Miis, but we are hoping for significant improvements over the DS game.

There was also more new info on *Mario Kart 3DS*, with Retro Studios being revealed as the developer behind the wheel of the new game. Wings can be deployed for large jumps, karts can now venture under water and it's possible to customise your vehicle and create Big Foot-style behemoths to race around in. Miis continue to be supported, SpotPass and StreetPass features will be available, and there are a number of new courses from Wuhu Island and *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.



Other highlights included new information on *Star Fox 64 DS*, including a new four-player multiplayer mode, a few more snippets of information on *Paper Mario 3D* and *Animal Crossing 3D* and some more exciting videos on *Super Mario*. With the exception of *Luigi's Mansion 2*, *Paper Mario 3D* and *Animal Crossing 3D*, all the games are due by the end of the year, meaning 3DS owners have plenty to look forward to. *

From the Show

>> The three games we are most looking forward to

Luigi's Mansion 2



We tweeted in excitement when we saw the quick sneak peek of *Luigi's Mansion 2* that Nintendo had casually thrown into its first showreel. In typical Nintendo style, the publisher was tight-lipped about most of the information surrounding Luigi's new outing, but we do know that it will take place across multiple mansions. A simple beam of light is no longer efficient to trap ghosts, so Luigi needs to utilise a strobe effect before he can hoover them up. As with the original, it's already looking like there will be plenty of secrets to uncover, which makes us very happy.

Super Mario



Amazingly, we only have to wait until the end of the year to play *Super Mario*. Nintendo has done everything it can to ensure depths and distances can be easily judged, and it's already looking like an exciting blend of both *New Super Mario Bros.* and *Super Mario Galaxy*. Mario has apparently picked up a number of new tricks, while the enemies have also evolved, such as tailed Goombas and a Piranha Plant that spits ink at the screen. Needless to say, we'll be watching the progress of this brand new *Mario* game very closely indeed.

Star Fox 64 3D



Yes it's been knocking around since last year's E3, but after witnessing the recent brilliance of *Ocarina Of Time* we are positively salivating for *Star Fox 64 3D*. In addition to being the best game in the series (deal with it, *Star Fox* fans) it's been given the same loving graphical update that *Ocarina Of Time* recently received. We're not too convinced by addition of tilt controls to a precision space shooter, but there's a standard analogue option to keep the old guard happy. Epic in scope and full of replay value, we're desperate to return to Fox McCloud's finest moment.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> The 3DS game I want the most is…

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

ShadowMan
I'm looking forward to *Super Mario* the most. I always enjoy the *Mario* platform games and this one looks like a nice blend of *Mario 3*-style 2D sections and the odd bit of 3D platforming.

ShadowNeku
I imagine I'll actually be getting ALL of them. Cant wait for *Star Fox*, but E3 footage of *Super Mario* has me pretty hyped.

gmintyfresh
It's about time *Star Fox* had a good run out; the series has been average for years. I think the game would be perfect for the 3DS because of the perspective. It's going to be fun avoiding all those enemy ships and dodging projectiles from a 3D viewpoint.

TheNewMonkey
Mario Kart – it's looking nice! Also, the underwater and gliding sections seem like a nice addition to mix things up a bit and keep it feeling fresh.

Hydrox
Paper Mario, *Luigi's Mansion 2* and *Super Mario* are absolute must-haves there.

Mire Mare
I will be forced into buying a 3DS if Nintendo gets *Super Mario Kart 3D* right. I think it will.

Megamixer
Paper Mario without a doubt. I enjoy these games much more than the core *Mario* games or any other spin-off. I might even buy a 3DS just to play it if I don't have one by the time it comes out.

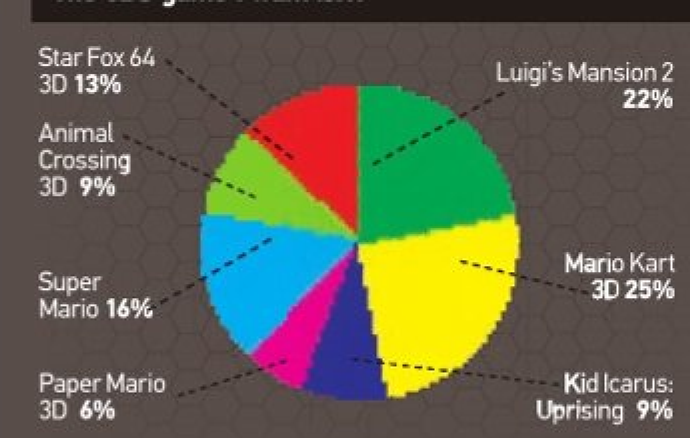
Morkin
Easy. *Animal Crossing.* I absolutely love that game.

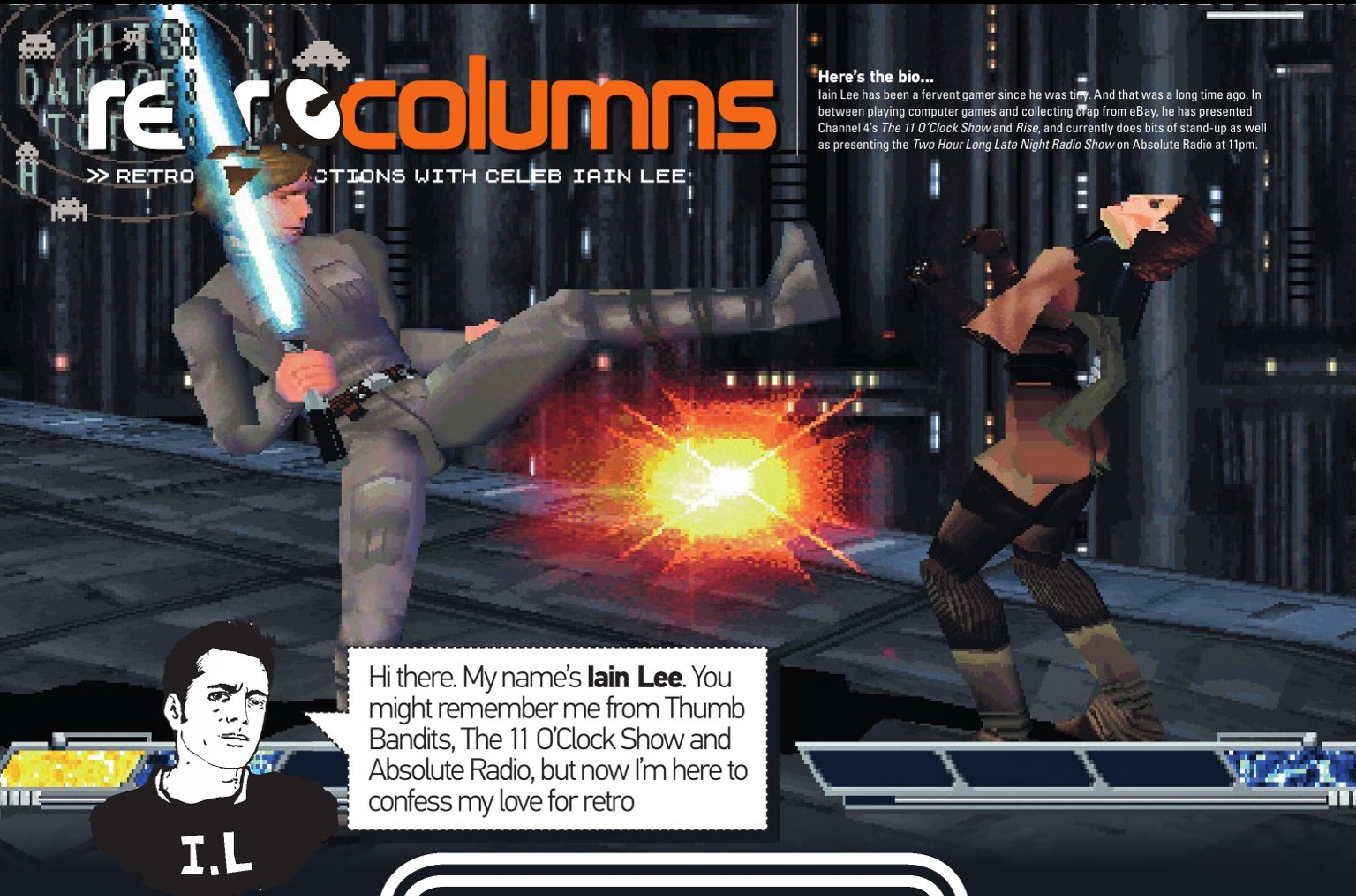
Paulie
Super Mario. That said, other than *Animal Crossing* I'm looking forward to all of them.

flying_delorean81
I went for *Mario Kart*, but to be honest I'm looking forward to all the games except *Animal Crossing* and *Paper Mario*.

FORUM OPINION

The 3DS game I want is…





retro columns

>> RETRO … CTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio…
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Guilty pleasures

I am watching *Popstar To Operastar*. If I'm honest, I quite enjoy the show. It's one of my guilty pleasures. The guy from Toploader has just come on and is having a pop at opera. I think we would all have to admit that Toploader were one of the worst bands of all time and should be obliterated from the annals of funky pop. But what a surprise! This guy may be pony in his crap band, but he can really sing opera! He just seems to have the voice and style for this centuries-old art form.

Only joking. He's shit. If anything, he's even worse than when he sings with his stupid group. But it's fun watching him, and apparently my mum likes him. I guess I'm getting the same satisfaction from this that many people did when they saw me 'acting' in *The Persuasionists*. And even my mum didn't like that! The chunky one from Steps is okay, though. And Andy Bell is a revelation. I thought he was dead.

What has this got to do with old computer games? Not a lot, but it has reminded me that some things that are rubbish can actually be quite good fun. One of my favourite games of all time is also one of the worst. I'd completely forgotten about it until I saw a copy in the Marie Curie shop for 50 pence.

Star Wars: Masters Of Teräs Käsi is a strange thing for me to like. It has so much going against it. First, it's a *Star Wars* game. I actively dislike *Star Wars* and have only ever seen the first two films. You know, the ones where they fly those spaceships and have some fights. Second, it is a very poor fighting game. It came out on the PSone – or PlayStation, as we used to call it back in the day – when there were so many better fighting games around, *Tekken* being my fave.

But there was something about seeing these badly rendered characters I barely knew, awkwardly trying to beat each other up or knock each other out of a ring that was floating in what I guess was space. That fascinated me. How did they get there? Why would Han Solo be fighting the big bear thing? I thought they were buddies. In fact, why would Han Solo be fighting Han Solo? It makes no sense.

My favourite thing about this game was that you could make your character have big head, hands and feet by pushing a few buttons just as the game was about to start. I found it hilarious to promise to my gaming buddies that this time I would not artificially enlarge any part of Darth Vader's body, only to do it right at the last second. Aha! In your face, people who I liked but probably found me quite irritating and as a result didn't keep in contact with me!

So, basically, this is a roundabout way of saying that it's okay to like games that other people perceive as being bobbins. As long as you get enjoyment out of it, that's groovy. So go on… what rubbish games gave you a cheap thrill?

Why would Han Solo be fighting the big bear thing? It makes no sense

Special thanks to John Szczepaniak for his hilarious screenshots



» [PS2] Konami's *Silent Hill* games set benchmarks for adult horror gaming, and still hold up very well today





PS2 CLASSICS GO HD

KONAMI BECOMES THE LATEST PUBLISHER TO JUMP ON THE REMAKE BANDWAGON

Over the last year, compilations of past classics have become more popular with both gamers and publishers. First, Sony released *God Of War Collection* and followed it up with *Sly Trilogy,* which was enhanced with 3D and additional Move-compatible mini-games. It's also announced a new *Team Ico Collection,* which we're still desperately awaiting.

Other publishers quickly followed, with Ubisoft releasing its *Prince Of Persia* trilogy and announcing a compilation featuring the first three *Splinter Cell* games, while Square Enix recently unleashed its enjoyable *Tomb Raider* trilogy featuring *Legend*, *Anniversary* and *Underworld*.

Now Konami has decided to get in on the action, announcing three new compilations that will all hopefully be on release by the end of this year.

Announced shortly before this year's E3, the series that has generated the most interest is, predictably, a new *Metal Gear Solid* collection. It will consist of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*, the *Subsistence* version of *Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater* and the excellent PSP game *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*. It's unclear at this stage whether *Sons Of Liberty* will be the *Substance* version, or if all the extras (like the online play and MSX games) from *Snake Eater Subsistence* will be included, but we'll keep you updated as we hear more news.

The second compilation Konami announced was for *Silent Hill*. This one isn't as jam-packed with classics as the *Metal Gear pack*, but it does feature *Silent Hill 2*, one of the finest examples of the genre. It's included with *Silent Hill 3*, but the rest of the PS2 games are surprisingly absent. Considering there are five games – *2, 3, 4: The Room*, *Origins* and *Shattered Memories* – you have to wonder why they've not been included. Then, of course, there's the fact that each pack is missing the PlayStation instalments that kicked off both franchises. It's disappointing (at least from a collector's point of view) that we're not being treated to a 'definitive' *Silent HIll* collection. Still, these compilations typically come at a budget price, and Kojima is famed for including numerous extras with his titles, so we're not writing them off yet – especially with the chance to play both *Snake Eater* and *Silent Hill 2* in glorious HD.

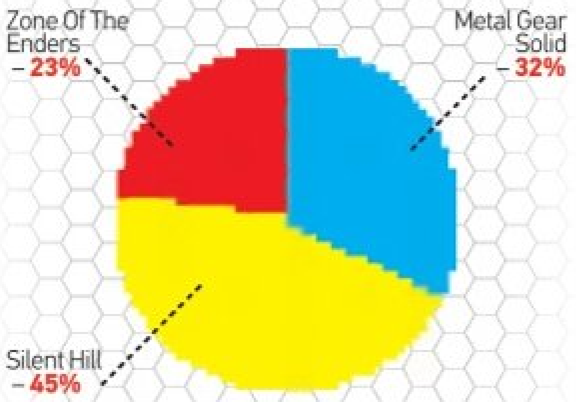
The final compilation that Konami announced was *Zone Of The Enders*, particularly surprising as the original PS2 games weren't massive sellers compared to the other two franchises. Nevertheless, it's a welcome addition because both titles are certainly worthy of your time, with sequel *The 2nd Runner* being all sorts of awesome.

The *Silent Hill* collection looks set to be an exclusive for the PS3, while both the collections for *Metal Gear Solid* and *Zone Of The Enders* will feature on PS3 and Xbox 360. In addition to HD updates, all games will feature Trophies or Achievements and are due later this year.

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Which compilation are you most looking forward to?



"I'd rather have a *Gradius* collection. And, after that, a massive arcade collection. It's about time Konami put one of those out, especially after Game Room went tits-up." **– PaulEMoz**

"Out of the three, *ZOE* – mainly as I never played the first one and didn't know there was a sequel until a few months ago." **– James A**

"If I had a PS3 I would be very interested in the *Silent Hill* collection." **– TheNewMonkey**

MICROBYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Return of the dead

Sega's delightful schlock-fest *House Of The Dead Overkill* will be moving from Wii to PS3 later this year. The new extended cut will feature Move and 3D support, and the original seven stages will be remastered along with two additional chapters. It will include undisclosed content and new game modes in addition to the usual trophy support. We thoroughly enjoyed the Wii original, so will certainly be keeping an eye on this update.



» Imagine Publishing announces new Android magazine

Fans of Android phones and tablets will be delighted to here of a new technology magazine that caters exclusively to the fast-growing format.

"Android represents the hottest in personal gadgets right now, with a third of all smartphones currently powered by the operating system," said Editor Andy Betts. "There are 400,000 Android devices activated every day, so we've created a magazine to serve this ever-growing audience and deliver the knowledge and know-how to help maximise the use of their cutting-edge mobile gadgets."

In addition to an extensive review section that will highlight all the best new games and apps, Android Magazine will also in-depth features, useful tutorials and even a dedicated hacking section, ensuring you get the very best out of your new mobile device.

Android Magazine is available from all good newsagents, supermarkets, Barnes & Noble, Borders and online at www.imagineshop.co.uk.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Tech Demo

Imagining how a bowl of fruit could translate into an awesome version of *Virtua Fighter* was tricky. But I'm sure I still said it was awesome. I had my reasons.

You have to understand that SEGA PR was very strict at E3 1998. Earlier in the week they'd sort of lied to us with incredible footage of a shoot'em up called *Geist Force*. After that we were all fighting to get behind closed doors to learn more about what Dreamcast had to offer. Imagine *Panzer Dragoon* looking like *Geist Force*! Wooooooo…

Sitting outside the demo room of the SEGA booth, I was handed a Dreamcast controller to fiddle with. It reminded me of the *NiGHTS* controller, so I liked it. SEGA kept me waiting for a long time, missing several appointments with insignificant people like EA and Acclaim to see the Dreamcast tech demo. I was passing out with excitement.

The demo showed a pretty room with a window, some chairs, and a table with a bowl of fruit on it. This was the entire demo. The SEGA engineer moved the camera around the scene, pointing out that inside this bowl of fruit were more polygons than could be managed by PlayStation in its wildest dreams. That's about all I can remember of the demo. Sorry.

There's a law about console tech demos, it seems; a psychological trick that means we must see something a million miles from what we want then try to reassemble it into whatever that might be. It could have something to do with the second law of thermodynamics. So when Microsoft shows us a room of mouse traps and throws in a ping-pong ball to set them all off, or a pavement in a pretty garden, we can immediately picture *Project Gotham Racing* and *Azurik: Rise Of Perathia*.

I didn't get to see the 3DO demos because they were before my time on magazines, but I remember looking at screenshots of a puzzled female character sharing a room with a disoriented bright orange raptor. Oh, and reading that it was going to be unbelievable. *Road Rash* and *Need For Speed* actually were pretty incredible. No roadside raptors though.

More recently, Nintendo has made abstract tech demos become the thing you eventually buy, confusing older journalists who think that star-jumping stick men gliding through neon cut-outs might eventually mean *Tekken 6* or photorealistic *Mario Kart*. In fact, it means star-jumping stick men floating through neon cut-outs for £20 including another controller.

With GameCube, however, there was an amazing haunted mansion-type environment that showed off all the lighting effects, collision detection and texture detail possible on a deceptively powerful machine that suffered unfairly in competition with the PlayStation runaway train.

I'd be really interested to find out what Atari showed journalists prior to the old VCS with *Pac-Man* and *Demon Attack*. I attended a BBC Micro seminar once in Manchester when I was little with my geek friend at the time. We saw lots of graphs then went home to draw Space Invaders on graph paper, making sense of it all.

I'd be interested to find out what Atari showed journalists prior to the old VCS

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

MASTER CHIEF HEADS A SURGE OF REMAKES AND UPDATES

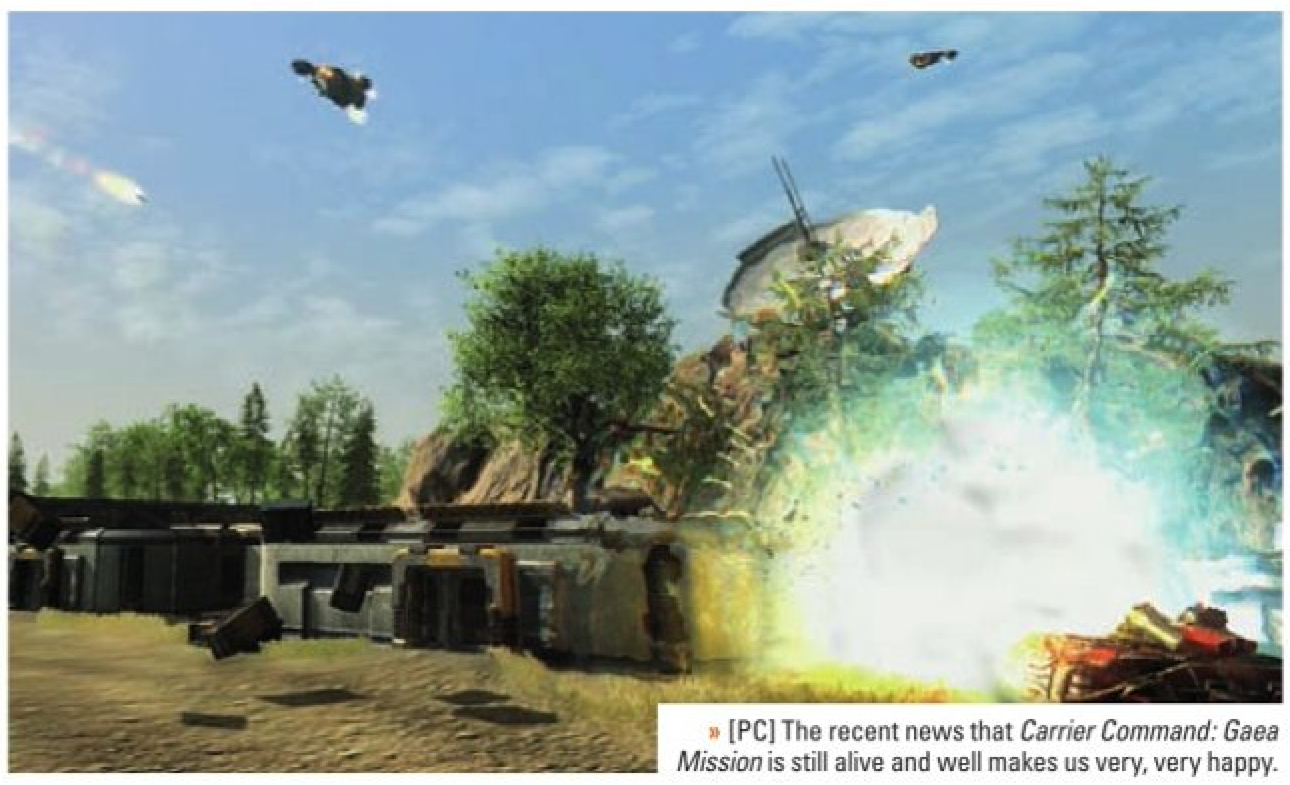
It's amazing to think that both the Xbox and *Halo* are now a decade old. To celebrate this fact, Microsoft used E3 to announce that it would be returning to the saturated franchise, with a new update of its hugely popular first-person shooter.

Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary is due later this year and features greatly remastered visuals, online co-op and six updated multiplayer maps from the Xbox original. Developed by 343 Industries (which has taken over *Halo* duties since the departure of Bungie) in collaboration with Certain Affinity and Saber Interactive, it's already looking like an impressive update of the classic console game. We've many fond memories of 16-player *Halo* sessions back in the day, so we're certainly interested to see if it is as good as it lives up to these memories.

Microsoft wasn't the only company digging up old games for a new outing though. Electronic Arts had further news on its upcoming reboot of *SSX* (and very nice it's looking too), Ubisoft showed off its reboot of *Driver*, while Konami had *Otomedius Excellent* (a spin-off of the *Parodius* series) and *Frogger 3D* announcements to complement its compilation news.

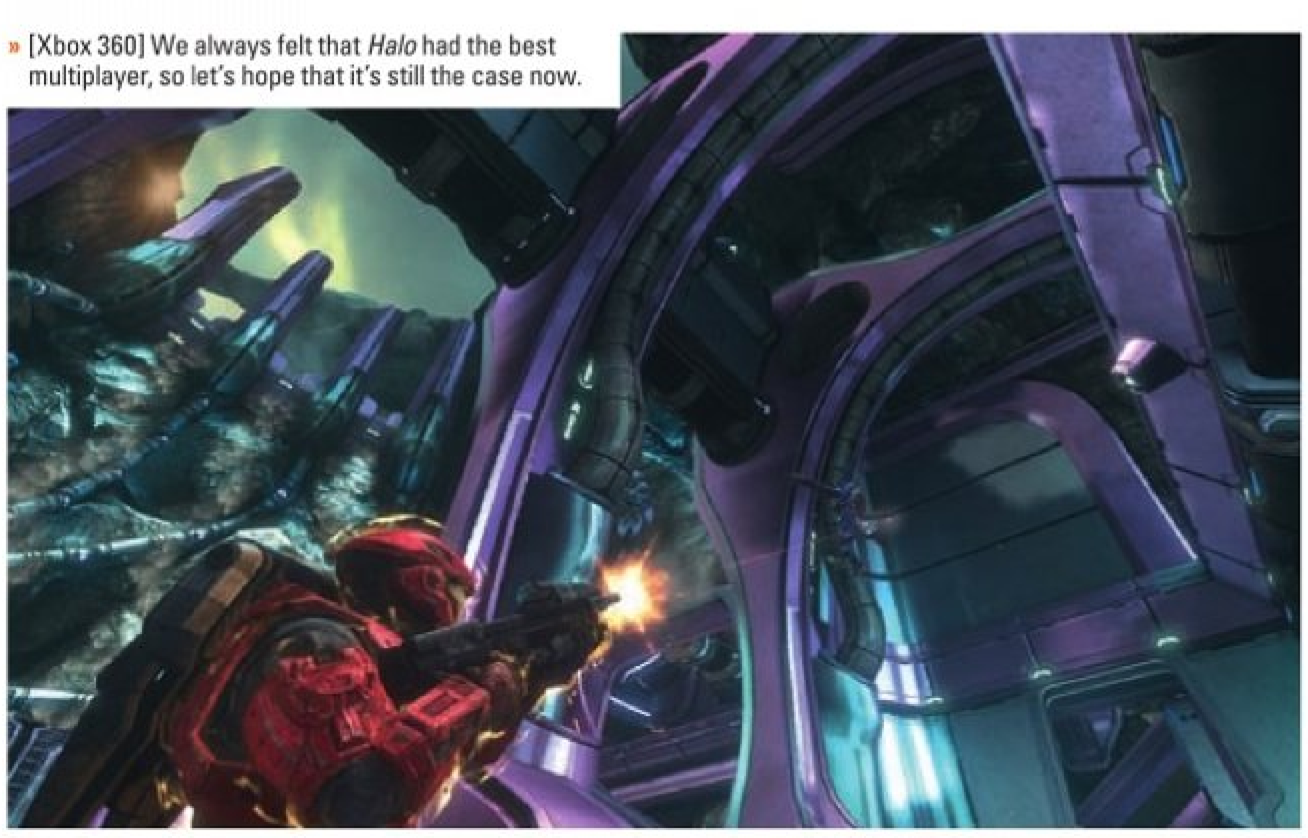
Additional 3DS news came in the form of a new *Centipede* game, *Centipede Infestation* by Atari, and a new *Tetris* title, which probably explains why Game Boy *Tetris* hasn't appeared on the 3DS's Virtual Console yet. *Tetris* will feature over 20 different game modes, Augmented Reality modes and plenty of focus on multiplayer, while *Centipede Infestation* will be a re-imagined update of the classic arcade hit that will featured a two-player co-op mode and over 20 different weapons and power-ups.

By far the most amazing news – especially from an 'Oh my goodness, did they just actually announce that?' perspective – was that Bohemia Interactive is still working on its new *Carrier Command* game. First announced all the way back in 2008, news has been so quiet that we feared the project was dead and buried. A brand new trailer, however, confirmed that *Carrier Command: Gaea Mission* is alive and well, and eager to build upon the excellent game that kick-started the franchise in 1988.

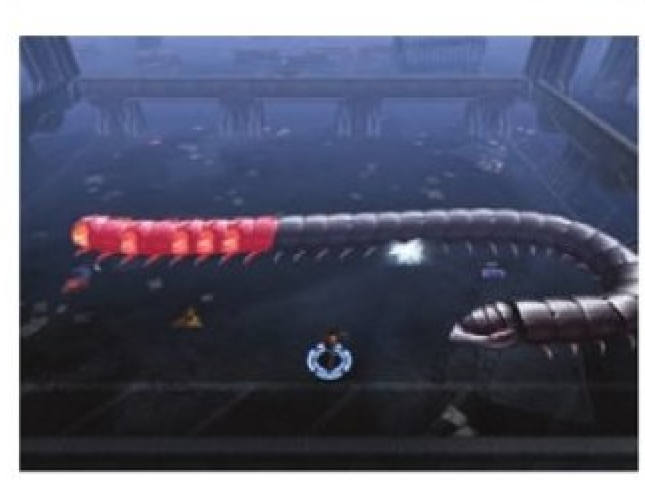

» [PC] The recent news that *Carrier Command: Gaea Mission* is still alive and well makes us very, very happy.



Gaea Mission will feature a huge free-roaming environment that has 33 unique islands to explore, a game mode based on the groundbreaking original game and several new gameplay mechanics that will appeal to a new generation of gamers. The PC-only game doesn't have a release date yet, but we wouldn't be surprised to see it sometime in 2012. *

» [Xbox 360] We always felt that *Halo* had the best multiplayer, so let's hope that it's still the case now.


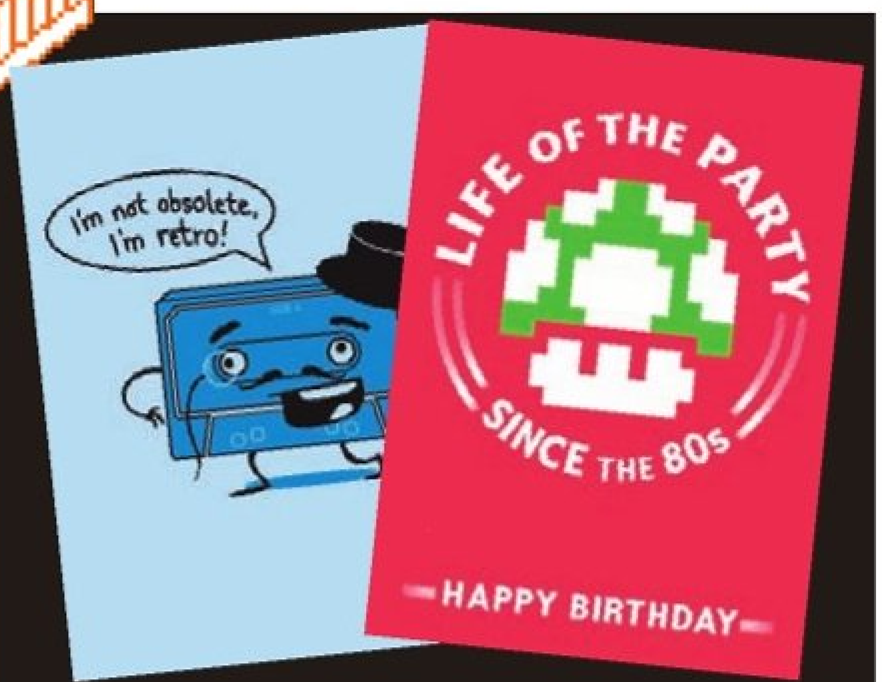
» [3DS] *Frogger 3D* is Konami's latest addition to the 30-year franchise, while Atari is working on *Centipede Infestation.*

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



Retro Birthday Cards

- **RRP:** £2.00 each inclusive of
- **Buy it from:** www.cardelicious.com

Call us miserable but we think shopping for greetings cards is one of the most irritating endeavours ever. The whole sorry experience, from selection to sending, is just a series of miniaturised annoying little efforts, of which nothing is straightforward. First you have to actually visit a card shop, which always seem to be busy at the exact time you need a card, and then you have to spend ten minutes trying to locate the appropriate area of the store that keeps the type of card you're looking for. Then when you've found the right section you have to make your selection, and this involves reading the messages inside to ensure that whatever your saying isn't something too ridiculous, too schmaltzy or naff – and depending on the calibre of the shop this can take forever. When you've finally found the card you want, you then check the card's lettered code against the relevant price chart to usually discover it's listed at some expensive and random price, like £5.32. Well, you get the idea. Luckily, online card shop Cardelicious has taken the aggro out of card shopping with a range of cool retro gaming-themed birthday cards that are all sensibly priced too.

Atari Joystick Keychain

- **RRP:** awaiting price
- **But it from:** www.beggarsbeliefdistribution.co.uk

Atari sold over 30 million VCS (2600) units before it was discontinued, making the hardware, and its durable joystick controller, pretty iconic. If you were one of those 30 million people, and are looking for the perfect accessory for your keys, then this keychain will probably be of interest to you. Not only does it keep your key company but it also features buttons that play sound clips from various Atari games, including *Pong*, *Missile Command*. Yes you read right, *Pong* sound clips. Just don't sit down with it in your back pocket.





Giant Tetris Wall Graphics

- **RRP:** $34.99 (approx £22)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

There's clearly an irony to be found in decorating walls with stickers of blocks, one so obvious we shouldn't really need to spell it out. But when the adhesive blocks are those well-known geometric Russian shapes from *Tetris* you can better understand the appeal of covering up your brick walls with stickers of bricks. These high-resolution wall graphics are printed with eco-solvent inks, and are pretty durable too – able to be removed and reapplied up to 100 times before they no longer serve their desired purpose.

Half-Life Headcrab Hat

- **RRP:** $29.99 (approx £18)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Astute readers may remember that we have featured these cuddly headcrabs from *Half-Life 2* in this section once before. However, there is one subtle difference between those plushy headcrabs and the ones featured this month – these have had their bellies removed so that they can be worn as hats and head-warmers. So if you somebody you know is a fan of *Half-Life 2* (which, let's face it, is fairly likely), and is complaining of cold hair, this could be a perfect gift for them.





*A MOMENT WITH...
Chuck Sommerville

Every issue, we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes meets Chuck Sommerville, developer of the cult puzzle game Chip's Challenge

Who is Chuck Sommerville?

Chuck Sommerville is a game designer who worked on a large number of titles, starting with *Snake Byte* in 1982 for Sirius Software. Having worked on *Gruds In Space*, *Summer Games*, *Destroyer*, *California Games* and both summer and winter editions of *The Games*, he produced the gem for which he is best known: *Chip's Challenge*. He recently made *Chuck's Challenge* on iPhone.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Chip's Challenge! Although I'd recommend other people's games as well, such as *D.R.O.D.*, which is a great puzzle game disguised as a dungeon-crawler.

What is your proudest memory?
Chip's Challenge continues to have a strong following – so much so that, at one point, two different developers with venture capital contacted me at the same time about doing a port to the iPhone and iPad. Because of copyright, we decided to do a similar game called *Chuck's Challenge*.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
The timing required to get the playing field to work on C64 *BallBlazer*. We had to build a custom logic analyser to capture the memory bus to study the timing of the stores to the hardware registers.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
I have a great respect for John Romero, Will Wright, Richard Garriott, Bill Budge, R.J. Mical, Stephen Landrum, and Greg Omi. Some are close friends, others I admire from a distance.

How would you like to be remembered?
First of all, I hope my games are entertaining. But mostly, I hope to exercise the brain.

Which game do you wish you'd made, and why?
D.R.O.D. Because the mechanic is simple, but the game potential is huge.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
Through the game industry, I met my business partner, Kevin Furry. Together we built a very successful business making lighting products out of LEDs. It started as L.E.D. Effects, and eventually merged with Lighting Science, which is now poised to be a very big player in the lighting industry.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
I spent a year and a half working on one of the initial release games for the M2, a new game console developed by 3DO. After all that time, just after we made it to alpha, they pulled the plug on the whole shebang. They cancelled the platform, and it was never released.



» [Lynx] *Chip's Challenge* became a smash-hit iconic game for the Atari Lynx.

> **"I spent a year and a half working on one of the initial release games for the M2"**



And your best?
John Romero threw a party and invited all the legendary Apple II game programmers to get together. I was honoured to be invited. Many of the people at the party were people I already knew and worked with; others were idols I thought I would never meet, like Steve Wozniak.

Can you share an interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
When I met Kevin Furry, we worked on *BallBlazer* together. This was a LucasArts game, and at the time Kevin worked for Lucas at Skywalker Ranch in Marin County. I got invited to the ranch and got a tour. That was awesome.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
Originally the industry was driven by programmers. That was when I got in. Over the years, it drifted into big business, and the programmers lost their design status, to become code monkeys. Lately, with mobile gaming, independent developers are able to go back to the starting model of programmer. *





retrodiary

22 July – 18 August

>> A month of retro events both past and present



22 July 1982
■ Tangerine Computer Systems announces the start of development on the Oric-1 micro.



25 July 1961
■ From small beginnings and all that… Clive Sinclair forms his first company, Sinclair Radionics.



26 July 1982
■ Quicksilva releases its first game on the Sinclair Spectrum, the *Space Invaders* clone *Space Intruders*.



30 July 1957
■ Howard Scott Warshaw, the games designer responsible for the Atari 2600 games *Yars' Revenge* and *E.T.* is born.

31 July 1967
■ Tecmo, the Japanese videogame developer responsible for creating the likes of *Rygar* and *Ninja Gaiden*, forms.



31 July 1980
■ Nintendo releases *Fire*, the fourth title in it's Game & Watch series.



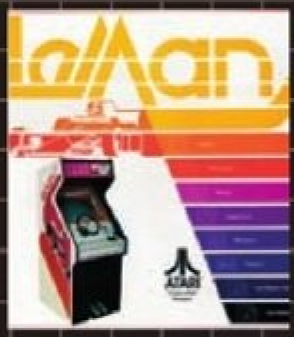
31 July 1992
■ *Ecco The Dolphin*, the maddeningly difficult puzzle arcade adventure, is released on the Mega Drive across Europe.



1 August 1985
■ Level 9 Computing, creators of many a well-crafted adventure, releases *Red Moon* on the Spectrum.



2 August 1985
■ The Amstrad CPC6128 goes on sale for the first time… in America. It wil arrive in the UK by the end of the year.



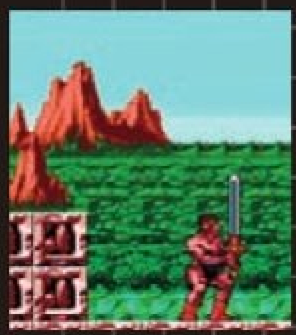
4 August 1974
■ Atari releases its latest arcade coin-op racing game, *Le Mans*.



9 August 1996
■ The first in the series of farming simulations, *Harvest Moon* is released in Japan on the Super Famicom.



10 August 1981
■ Grandstand releases the electronic table-top game *Astro Wars* in the UK under licence from Epoch Co.



10 August 1990
■ The side-scrolling hack-and-slash-fest known as *Rastan Saga II* is released by Taito on the Mega Drive.



12 August 1982
■ Coleco Industries releases the magnificently retro-looking Colecovision, complete with a faithful conversion of *Donkey Kong*.



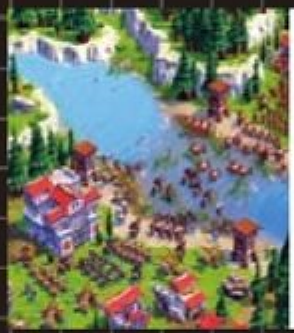
12-14 August 2011
■ The second UK *Pinball Party* event is to be held at the Barcelo Daventry Hotel, Daventry, Northamptonshire.



15 August 2000
■ *Chrono Cross*, the sequel to the Square's hugely popular RPG *Chrono Trigger*, is released in America on PlayStation.



16 August 2010
■ The GP2X Caanoo open source handheld console from Gamepark Holdings goes on sale for the first time.



16 August 2011
■ *Age Of Empire Online* is to be released by Microsoft on Windows.



18 August 2010
■ There's a return to form for *Tomb Raider* as *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* debuts on Xbox 360.



18 August 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

retro GAMER

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



CHARTS

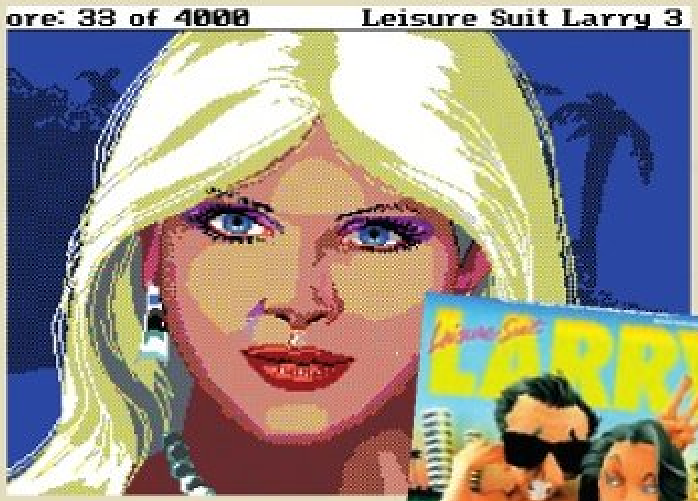
OCTOBER 1989



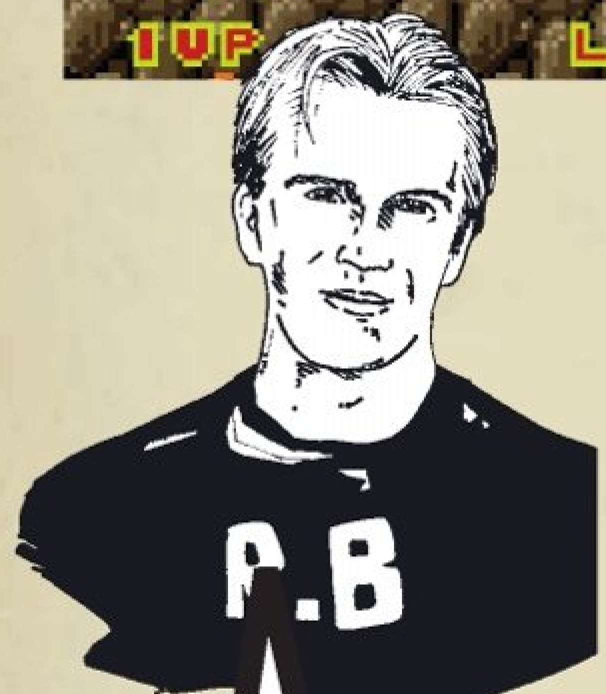
COMMODORE 64

1	Enduro Racer (Hit Squad)
2	Robocop (Ocean)
3	The Bard's Tale (Electronic Arts)
4	Green Beret (Hit Squad)
5	1942 (Encore)

»[Atari ST] Larry is dumped by his wife for an Amazonian lesbian slot-machine repairwoman. These things happen…







OCTOBER 1989 – The Edge gets Punished, Thalamus is on The Search for Sharla, Larry is back for a sloppy third, Maniac Mansion goes 16-bit while Football Manager goes World Cup. Richard Burton hopes there is a corruption option in it…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1989

The Edge, that's the software house and the not the guitarist from U2, revealed that it had signed a deal with Marvel Comics to produce games based on its comic book characters. Already under development was a first-person shooter game based on the movie version of Marvel's *The Punisher*.

The Edge also promised not one but three games based on Marvel's most popular title, *The Uncanny X-Men*, but disappointingly nothing was released other than the Amiga and Atari ST versions of *The Punisher* – which were both stinkers.

Meanwhile, in the USA, Paragon Software also revealed a Marvel tie-in deal which promised much the same. It released *The Punisher* on Amiga and Atari ST and an *X-Men* game on the Commodore 64. Once again, all titles concerned were turd-like in content.

It later transpired that The Edge was only a few months from going into liquidation. It had provided the code for Paragon's *The Punisher* – which was the same as the UK release. Presumably, money woes meant projects had to be cancelled, leaving Paragon to pick up the licences and develop the other games in-house.

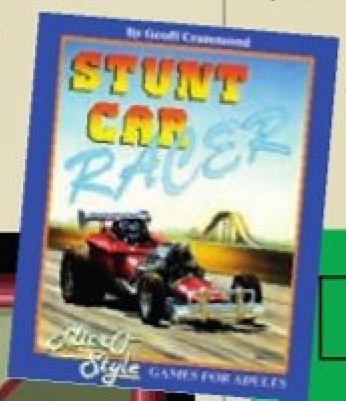
Thalamus, the software arm of Newsfield Publications, also had information on its new game, *The Search For Sharla*. It was to be the developer's most ambitious project yet and was pitched as an epic exploration adventure game, akin to being the illegitimate offspring of *Lords Of Midnight* and *Dungeon Master*. Reported to have tens of thousands of graphical locations and 500 interactive characters, it promised much. Amiga, ST, Spectrum and C64 versions were scheduled… yet nothing was released on any system.

Sharla had been contracted out to third-party developer Esprit Software. With various versions in varying states of completion, all development work had been seemingly dropped on instruction from Thalamus. There were rumours of Thalamus not paying Esprit.

The original PC Engine had still not (and would never be) officially released in the UK, so there was some trepidation as to whether NEC's new console, the PC Engine 2, would find its way to UK shores.

The new system was reported to be much more powerful than its predecessor, with vastly improved graphics-handling capabilities. The video RAM had doubled to 128K, the standard RAM quadrupled from 8K to 32K, it had double the colour palette and featured a second chip for the much-vaunted graphics. With the pack-in game for the official release announced as *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, it all sounded rather splendid. In fact, this secretive project was apparently ready for release in Japan in a matter of weeks.

It was renamed the SuperGrafx, duly released and flopped badly.

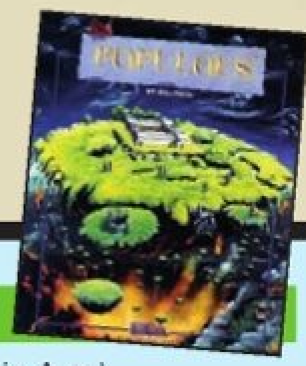


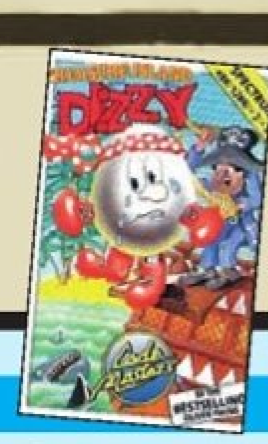


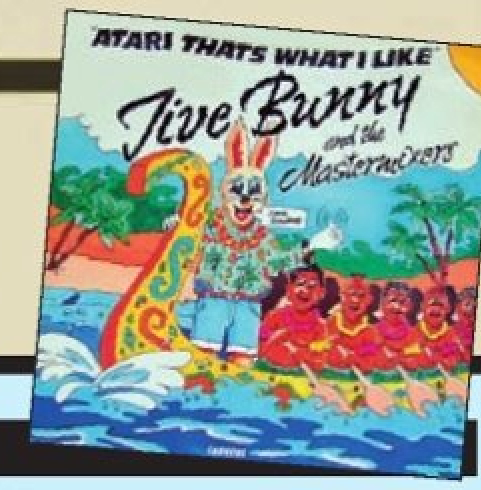
»[Amiga] *Stunt Car Racer* may have had chunky polygon graphics, but the physics and tracks more than compensated.



»[Spectrum] *Football Manager* was back for the World Cup.







AMIGA

1. Populous (Electronic Arts)
2. Forgotten Worlds (US Gold)
3. Kick Off (Anco)
4. Falcon Missions (Mirrorsoft)
5. Silkworm (Virgin)

SPECTRUM

1. Treasure Island Dizzy (Codemasters)
2. Enduro Racer (Hit Squad)
3. Postman Pat (Alternative)
4. MIG 29 (Codemasters)
5. Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Hit Squad)

MUSIC

1. That's What I Like (Jive Bunny & The Mastermixers)
2. Ride On Time (Black Box)
3. Pump Up The Game (Technotronic ft. Felly)
4. Girl I'm Gonna Miss You (Milli Vanilli)
5. Street Tuff (Rebel MC & Double Trouble)

OCTOBER 1989 NEWS

17 October saw a huge earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter Scale hit San Francisco, causing widespread damage. It struck just after 5pm during rush hour but incredibly the final loss of life was limited to 63. However, over 100,000 buildings were severely damaged, with freeways suffering particularly badly. The two-tiered Nimitz freeway and the Bay Bridge freeway both partially collapsed, creating a concrete sandwich of cars which accounted for many of the dead.



» California famously sits on the San Andreas fault line.

On 19 October, the Guildford Four were finally released after a lengthy appeal that saw their convictions being quashed by the Court Of Appeal. The four Irish men with supposed IRA links were jailed for life in 1975 after being found guilty of the bombing of pubs in Guildford. Several people were killed or injured in the blasts.

The inquiry found that Surrey police may have conferred when creating the accused men's statements, and also found flaws with their paperwork and the noting of the confessions. The Four were released immediately after.

On 4 October, Monty Python member Graham Chapman, passed away at the age of just 48 after battling throat and spinal cancer. Arguably Chapman's best-loved role was as Brian in *The Life Of Brian*.

9 October also saw the passing of actress Bette Davis, who died at the age of 81. Her forthright, almost intimidating persona led to her playing many strong women in a long, distinguished career.

Only seven original games that utilised its extra power were released, despite its backwards-compatibility with the original.

With Atari having unveiled its Lynx handheld the previous month, Nintendo responded with news that its own handful of fun, the Game Boy, had just passed one million units sold, with Nintendo producing 300,000 new units a month. That should've cheered Atari up…

Sierra Entertainment announced that *Leisure Suit Larry 3: Passionate Patti In Pursuit Of The Pulsating Pectorals* was ready to ship, and would see the welcome return to the original formula of the first game, rather than the linear adventure style of the second.

After being dumped by his wife, Larry was back out on the pull, attempting to woo and shag anything female, with his ultimate goal being to get together with Patti. As with other *Larry* games, it had its fair share of smut and titillation, which made it a must-have game for every teenage lad. Sierra also added the nice touch of being able to play Patti in a later segment of the game. It was available initially on PC with ST and Amiga versions to follow.

Geoff Crammond, the maestro behind the wonderfully absorbing *The Sentinel*, revealed he had finished his latest project, *Stunt Car Racer*. It would be released on the Micro Style label with a release date of late October for the Spectrum and C64. The superb 3D racer, which was like an amalgam of a racing game and rollercoaster ride, was just stunning. Amiga and ST versions followed and they too were excellent. A sequel was announced but unfortunately never materialised.

Football Manager creator and beard cultivator Kevin Toms divulged that his classic old management game had undergone a revamp for the forthcoming 1990 World Cup. *The World Cup Edition* would follow the same simplistic, but very playable, format of his previous football games, with new graphics and new highlights section with multiple views. Quality varied from format to format, with the Commodore 64 version stinking like a septic tank full of kippers, to the Spectrum edition which fared best.

»[Amiga] *The Punisher* was a masterclass in how to ruin a licensed product and create an FPS with no character or soul.



»[Amiga] *Maniac Mansion* on the C64 was simply awesome. Thankfully the Amiga conversion turned out to be just as great.



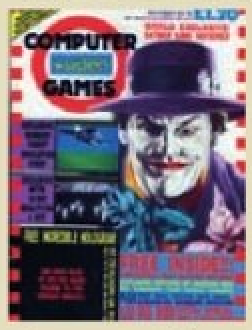


The fantastic C64 version of *Maniac Mansion* had been around for almost two years but finally, and thankfully, Lucasfilm Games was about to release it on the ST and Amiga. The superlative point-and-click adventure had been a runaway success on the Commodore 64; the surprise was not that Lucasfilm was releasing it, but why it had taken so long. The 16-bit versions proved to be as fantastic as the original.

Computer & Video Games scrutinized this month's bulging selection of new releases with *Batman* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Sim City* (Infogrames/Maxis, Amiga), *Dragon Spirit* (Domark, Atari ST), *Myth* (System 3, Commodore 64), *F15 Strike Eagle II* (MicroProse, PC), *Shufflepuck Café* (Domark/Broderbund, Amiga), *Super Gridrunner* (Llamasoft, Atari ST), *Bomber* (Activision, PC), *Arthur* (Infocom, Amiga), *Rastan II* (Taito, Arcade), *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (Sega, Mega Drive) and *World Cup Football* (Sega, Mega Drive) being the cream of the gaming crop.

THIS MONTH IN…

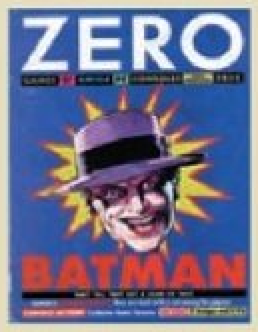
COMPUTER & VIDEOGAMES



More Konix Multisystem news arose as the official release date fast approached. The *C&VG* team waxed lyrical about the system's capabilities. Sadly misguided, the Konix story would unravel in the coming weeks…



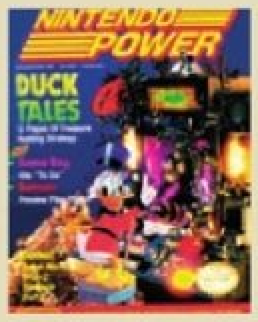
ZERO



New magazine alert! Issue minus one of *Zero* was given away with various publications to promote its launch in November. The 16-page taster issue looked at the Konix Multisystem, except this time the first questions of feasibility were raised regarding the Power Chair.



NINTENDO POWER



In *Power*, the new NES Satellite, that would allow for up to four-player wireless gaming, was highlighted. It worked by an infrared plug-in from the console to the Satellite main unit, which your controllers plugged in to. Few supported games were released.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



»[SNES] Despite the sickly sweet graphics, *The Wizard Of Oz* was a playable and enjoyable arcade adventure.



»[Amiga CD32] *Impossible Mission* on C64 was going to be a hard act to follow, so it was included in the new game.



»[Amiga CD32] *Universe* was a very polished product but faced tough competition from *Beneath A Steel Sky*.



MARCH 1994 – point at the Steel Sky and click on Universe, Impossible Mission refreshed, Sega's Multi-Mega is not so mega, Sensible goes golfing and the SNES goes to Oz. Richard Burton doesn't think he's in Kansas anymore…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1994

U*niverse*, the sci-fi point-and-click adventure game by Core Design, was nearing completion. Core also revealed that it had especially commissioned hand-painted backdrops that would be digitised to make for some spectacular graphics. *Universe*'s atmosphere would be enhanced by a wonderful ambient soundtrack and had idiot-proof controls. There would even be a couple of arcade segments incorporated into the game.

The story was as simple as the controls; your character, Boris, had inadvertently transported himself into an alternate dimension, and had to return to his own (while saving the universe in the process). It proved to be a testing yet enjoyable game when released on the Amiga and PC.



»[PC] *Beneath A Steel Sky* was a fantastic point and click adventure (and given away free with issue 6 of **Retro Gamer**!)

Developed by Revolution Software, *Beneath A Steel Sky* was released by Virgin. Similar to *Universe*, it would also contain hand-painted backgrounds courtesy of *Watchmen* and *2000AD* legend Dave Gibbons.

Steel Sky had a wonderfully immersive Orwellian atmosphere to it, with the story comparably bleak. You have been abducted from your miserable wasteland home and are being moved by helicopter to another location… that is, until it crashes. You seize the opportunity to escape and the quest to find out why you were abducted begins. Amiga and PC owners were in for a treat.

For Sega fans, the first sightings of its new console were filtering into the news sections of games magazines. No, not the Saturn, but the Sega Multi-Mega. Essentially a Mega Drive and Mega-CD unit merged together into one case, it was seen as Sega's last attempt to sway gamers to embrace the Mega-CD format – which hadn't exactly set the world on fire. Priced at around £350, that would take quite some doing. It was also released in the US as the Sega CDX. Different name, same apathy.



»[Amiga] *Sensible Golf* wasn't in the same league as *Sensible Soccer* but as a multiplayer game it was hugely entertaining.

Another visitor? Stay a while, stay forever… ha ha ha… Yep, it's the instantly recognisable intro to the C64 classic *Impossible Mission* by Epyx. It was a corker of a game back in 1984, so ten years later MicroProse took on the unenviable task of updating it for a new audience with *Impossible Mission 2025: The Special Edition* for the Amiga and CD32.

Many found it disappointing compared to the original C64 version, even though MicroProse included the C64 classic version as an added bonus. It was a fair game, but would always be unfavourably compared to the graphically inferior but gameplay-superior 8-bit rendition.

Having conquered the world of football with *Sensible Soccer*, Sensible Software was back, clad in plus-fours with putter in hand. *Sensible Golf* would attempt to recreate the ease of playability of its football game by keeping an arcade feel and shy away from an over-complicated and

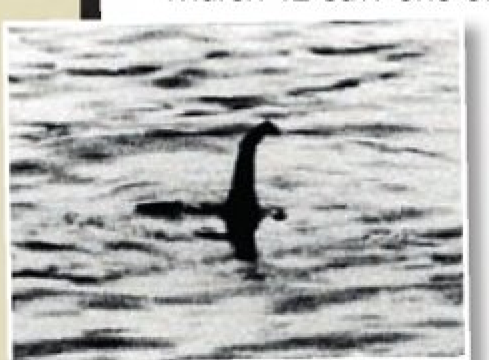


»Wet Wet Wet's 'Love Is All Around' cover was number 1 for 15 weeks.

MARCH 1994 NEWS

1 March saw serial killer Fred West charged with two counts of murder after a search of his property in Gloucester uncovered further human remains. West was already facing a murder charge after confessing to killing his 16 year-old daughter, whose remains were found buried under his patio. He would later be charged with a total of twelve murders of girls and young women. His wife, Rosemary West, was sentenced to life without any possibility of release, while Fred West avoided sentencing by hanging himself while on remand in prison.

March 12 saw one of the most recognisable images of the Loch Ness Monster finally dismissed as a hoax. The so-called Surgeon's Photo was shot in April 1934 by surgeon Robert Wilson, and showed a long necked creature rising from the water. 60 years later, Christian Spurling revealed he was asked by his stepfather, big game hunter Marmaduke Wetherall, to create a realistic-looking serpent model.



»Finally revealed to be a hoax, this 60 year old photo helped establish and perpetuate the Loch Ness Monster mystery.

March 1994 was also the month that Mike Newell unleashed *Four Weddings And A Funeral* on an unsuspecting cinema audience. Starring Hugh Grant as Hugh Grant and an unlikeable Andie McDowell as the unlikeable American he falls in love with, it's most memorable for Wet Wet Wet's truly awful rendition of The Troggs' 'Love Is All Around'.

serious simulation style. After a prolonged development period, *Sensible Golf* finally teed off late 1995 on the Amiga and PC.

The pick of the new SNES games out this month was *Super Metroid*, having just been released in Japan and with Europe having to wait another few months longer. The huge open-plan platform world of Zebes where you search for the Metroid was beautiful to explore with its crisp graphics. It was impressively moody and designed to keep you hunting for more power-ups, hidden areas and secret moves. *Super Metroid* was a fantastic game, yet surprisingly didn't sell particularly well in Japan despite receiving rave reviews.

On the horizon were two offerings making use of Nintendo's Super FX chip; *Stunt Race FX*, a polygon heavy racing game and *Vortex*, a 3D shoot-'em-up. It was a similar story to *Super Metroid* with neither game selling well when released, although reviews for *Stunt Race FX* were more favourable than *Vortex*.

Seta released a SNES-only game based on *The Wizard Of Oz*. The adventure platform game saw you play Dorothy as you took on the Wicked Witch of the West. With ruby slippers in position, you set off through several colourful, well-defined worlds, with the Tin Man, Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion found in each of the first three worlds. Once located, each of them could be controlled with their own abilities.

The fourth and final world saw you battle your green-faced pointy-hatted water-dodging nemesis. It was attractive and pleasant enough, but were it not for the *Oz* connection it would surely have just faded into the background as just another game.

It was a magazine graveyard this month with Impact Magazines on the verge of going bust and several of its key magazines abruptly ending. *Amiga Force* and *SNES Force* were wound up along with old favourite *Commodore Force*, and the magazine formerly known as *Zzap!* stopped at issue 106. And so the final member of the magazine Holy Newsfield Trinity of *Zzap!*, *Crash* and *Amtix!* fell, and the last straggler of the golden era disappeared…

Reviews time, and *Mean Machines Sega* cast a roving eye over this month's fare with *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* (Sega, Mega Drive) taking the majority of the plaudits.

Other big-hitters were: *NBA Jam* (Acclaim, Mega Drive), *Road Rash* (US Gold, Master System), *Sensible Soccer* (Sony, Game Gear), *Double Switch* (Sega, Mega-CD), *Bubba 'N' Stix* (Core Design, Mega Drive), *Streets Of Rage II* (Sega, Master System) and *Micro Machines* (Codemasters, Master System).

Superplay countered with SNES games that would whet your appetite and wet your knickers in equal measure. Their top-rating reviews included *Mega Man X* (Capcom), *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja 2* (Konami), *NBA Jam* (Acclaim) and *Wolfenstein 3D* (Imagineer).

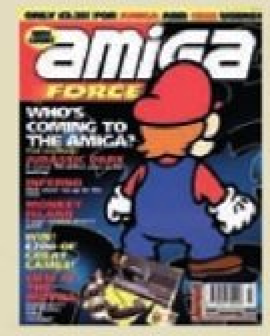




»[SNES] One of the best SNES games ever released yet sold poorly in Japan. Work that one out…

THIS MONTH IN…

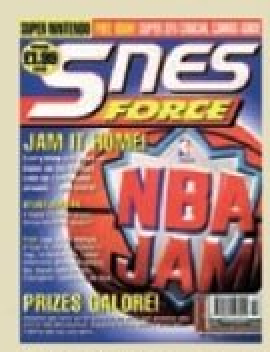
AMIGA FORCE



Impact Magazines finally succumbed to financial difficulties and went bust, taking *Amiga Force* with it. Ironically, the 16th and last issue was the first for the magazine after undergoing design changes and a brand new editorial team. Your P45 is in the post…



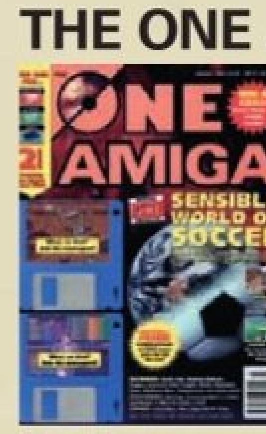
SNES FORCE



Another Impact casualty was *SNES Force*, although they had a great feature on something we all miss: a day out at a big arcade. Highlights of the trip were Konami's new seated simultaneous four-player racer, *Racing Force*, and SNK's beat-em-up pairing of *Samurai Showdown* and *Fatal Fury Special*.



THE ONE AMIGA



The feature of this issue was an interview with Sensible Software on how it would improve on its original game… with *Sensible World Of Soccer*, that's how. Just add over 15,000 teams, 27,000 players and a manager mode.



CHARTS

MARCH 1994

AMIGA



1. Mortal Kombat (Acclaim)
2. Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
3. Frontier: Elite II (Gametek)
4. Street Fighter II (Kixx)
5. Jurassic Park (Ocean)

SNES



1. Super Mario All-Stars (Nintendo)
2. Aladdin (Capcom)
3. Jurassic Park (Ocean)
4. Street Fighter II Turbo (Capcom)
5. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)

COMMODORE 64



1. Street Fighter II (US Gold)
2. Street Fighter (Kixx)
3. Golden Axe (Tronix)
4. WWF European Rampage (Ocean)
5. Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk (Codemasters)

MUSIC

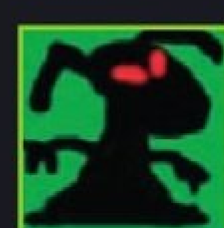
1. Doop (Doop)
2. Without You (Mariah Carey)
3. The Sign (Ace Of Base)
4. Streets Of Philadelphia (Bruce Springsteen)
5. I Like To Move It (Reel To Real Ft. The Mad Stuntman)



Blinky's Scary School

A SPOOKY LESSON IN CASTLE RECLAMATION AND TOILET FLUSHING

#40



» SPECTRUM
» ZEPPELIN GAMES LTD
» 1990

Drumtrochie Castle was haunted. Ancestral ghosts had wandered its halls for years, moaning and groaning, rattling chains, all the usual stuff. They had a rare old time of it. That is, until Red Laird McTavish decided he'd had enough. 'Och! It's ma castle, and nae ghosties or ghoulies or long-leggity beasties are going tae spoil ma legendary haggis banquets!' he thought to himself. So he decided to take up ghost-hunting and rid Drumtrochie of every last spectre.

Exactly 100 years have passed since he did just that, and the head spectre at the Ghost School has decided that Red's descendant, Hamish, has bragged about his ancestor's antics once too often. So he sends star pupil Blinky out on his first assignment, to recapture the castle for haunting. Blinky has only one night to succeed in this or he faces another 100 years at scare school, a fate worse than death. It's up to the player to help him complete his task and put the wind up Hamish's kilt.

Blinky certainly lives up to his name, fluttering his eyes as you bounce along the platforms trying to round up ingredients for a magic potion. These are scattered throughout the mansion, which although devoid of spooks, has a nasty collection of rats, bats and insects which seem to be out to get poor Blinky. The old place is also in a bit of a state, and pieces of it keep tumbling down, making it even trickier for our hero to travel unscathed.

Bouncing around on the platforms can be a bit annoying sometimes too, as you'll occasionally clip the edge of one, which sends you bouncing off in a different direction from which you intended. A bit of practice soon fixes this though, and before long you'll be zipping over battlements and even down the loos. Yes, the loos.

Another way to traipse about is via the toilet-warps, which flush you away to another part of the castle. You have to make sure you have enough bog paper though – I suppose Blinky needs to wrap himself in something so he doesn't end up as a poor poopy poltergeist!

It's the little touches in *Blinky* that really make it stand out – the aforementioned eye-fluttering, the bits when you go into a dark room and can only see his eyes, the toilets – all of these give it a certain charm. Evidently, Blinky is a pale little pal that's a lot of fun to hang around with. *



RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** EWEN KIRK
- » **JOINED:** 30TH MAY 2009
- » **LOCATION:** SCOTLAND
- » **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
- » **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net



END OF THE 8-BITS



In a special hardware feature, Martyn Carroll charts the rise and fall of the 8-bit micro generation and looks back at the ways in which hardware manufacturers tried to stave off the unstoppable 16-bit advance

To all intents and purposes, the Eighties was the 8-bit era. The decade that brought us big hair, bad fashion and Macaulay Culkin also witnessed the unstoppable advance of the home computer. Many of the most popular machines of the time were powered by 8-bit processors, and the biggest-selling 8-bit of them all, the Commodore 64, sold more than 13 million units before the decade was out. That's a lot of bread bins.

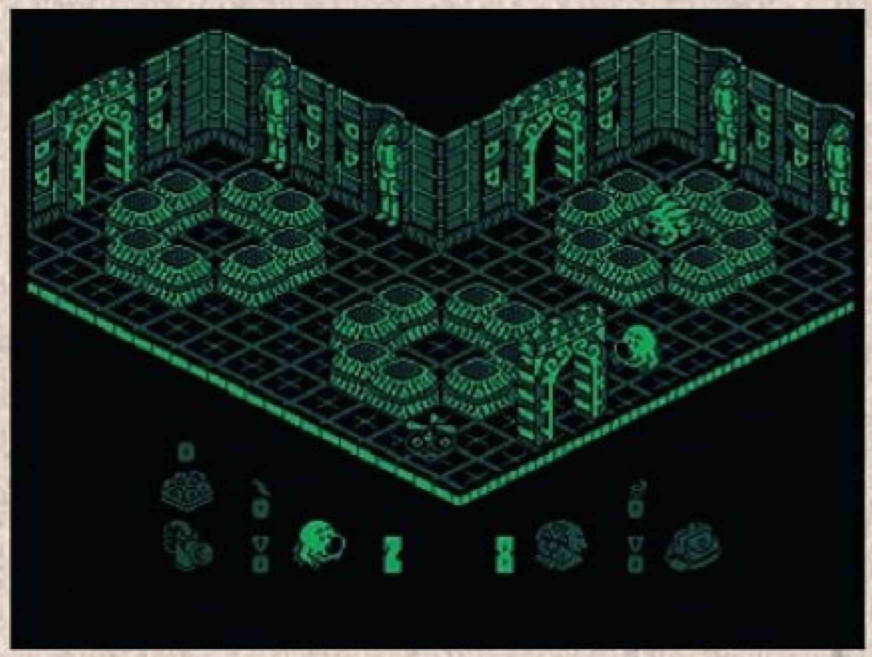
Of course, it would be a bit silly to suggest that the 8-bit era began and ended in the Eighties. How could we forget the big three, the so-called 'trinity' of the Apple II, the Tandy TRS-80 and the Commodore PET 2001 that all launched in 1977? And what about the fact that 8-bit computers were still being manufactured for the best part of the Nineties?

The reason is simply that the Eighties are neatly bookended by two hugely significant events in 8-bit history. The first was the launch of the Sinclair ZX80 in February 1980. Here was a smart little machine, which you could buy pre-built for less than £100 at a time when existing computers might set you back ten times that amount. Sinclair's desire to make computing affordable and accessible to all meant that anyone could now purchase a micro without having to sell their children to medical science to fund it.

The second event was the release of the SAM Coupé in December 1989, just days before the end of the decade. This hyped-up, souped-up 8-bit was supposed to offer 16-bit performance at a fraction of the cost, yet it was beset by problems and failed to make any impact in a market where 16-bit



» The Commodore VIC-20: business up front, party out back.



» [PCW] Even though the PCW was marketed as a word processor, plenty of games were released for it, including the isometric classic *Head Over Heels*.



machines like the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST were beginning to dominate. The failure of the SAM Coupé proved that, as the Nineties rolled around, no one with a sane and healthy mind wanted a new 8-bit computer.

THE 8-BIT INFLUX

It certainly wasn't like that in the early Eighties, as sales of 8-bit computers popped off the pages of market analysts everywhere. The ZX80 sold in excess of 100,000 units in 18 months, with Sinclair reporting that 60 per cent of those were shipped overseas to the US, mainland Europe, Australia and Japan. Its successor, the ZX81, offered more functionality for less money and rewarded Sinclair with sales of 400,000 in its first year and 600,000 in its second. The ZX Spectrum colour computer, which arrived in 1982, fared even better by recording sales of 1 million in just 18 months. The overwhelming success of the Spectrum surprised everyone – chief among those being Sinclair itself, which couldn't keep up with demand for the computer everyone wanted.

Despite Sinclair's success, particularly in the UK, worldwide computer sales were mainly driven by the more mature US market. In 1981, the number of Apple IIs sold stood at 210,000 – a decent figure when you consider that, in 1977, Wozniak and Jobs only managed to shift 600. Selling slightly better than the Apple II was the Tandy TRS-80, which achieved sales of 250,000 in 1981. Both machines had pulled away from the PET, yet Commodore wasn't about to throw in the towel. In 1981 it introduced the VIC-20 computer, a scaled-down PET for the home – a family PET, if you like. Priced at $299 and readily available from your average retail store rather than specialist dealers, the VIC-20 was an instant hit, with sales of 600,000 in 1982.

Recording similar sales that year was Atari's 8-bit line. The economical 400 and premium 800 models were launched in late 1979, and Atari's new Home Computer Division saw sales double year on year. That stellar growth would end abruptly in 1983, however, as Commodore's newly launched machine, the Commodore 64, went toe-to-toe with the Atari 8-bits and emerged victorious. The C64's worldwide sales figures were simply bonkers. 1983: 2 million sold. 1984: 2.5 million sold. The same number again in 1985. And 1986! No other 8-bit computer came close to matching these numbers, although in the US the Apple II and Atari 8-bit lines were gutsy runners-up.

In Europe it took longer for the dominant formats to emerge, mainly because there was so much competition. At times during 1982 and 1983, not a month would go by without a new 8-bit entering the already-crowded micro market. There was the Dragon 32, the Jupiter Ace, the Grundy NewBrain, the Camputers Lynx, the Memotech MTX and the Oric-1, to name but a few. The release of so many different, incompatible computers ultimately led to the creation of the MSX standard, which saw manufacturers such as Sony, Philips and Toshiba release MSX-branded machines in several regions, including Europe and Japan. In the UK, the Spectrum and the C64 fought it out to be number one, with third place initially going to Acorn and

Jez San



"It was 1984. I had just heard about the Lorraine computer by Amiga. Then in 1985 Commodore bought Amiga and it looked like it would become a big mainstream home computer. I got myself one of the first ones, and coupled with an Atari ST, my early venture into 16-bit computing was born.

"I had started learning how to program in 68000 assembly language using an Apple Mac and Sinclair QL as development environments. When I received the Amiga and ST I started porting my work over to them. Originally it was going to be a port of the *Star Wars* coin-op, but after conversations with Atari's licensing department were unfruitful, I decided to make an original game. I had recently helped port *Elite* over to the Commodore 64 and Rainbird owed me a big favour, so we negotiated a publishing contract for my first original game, *Starglider*. And it was to be one of the first 3D games on a 16-bit computer. To me, 8-bit was dead."

SEISMIC EVENTS IN 8-BIT COMPUTING HISTORY

1975 THE FIRST COMPLETE PERSONAL MICROCOMPUTER, THE MITS ALTAIR 8800, IS LAUNCHED. IT IS POWERED BY THE INTEL 8080 8-BIT CPU AND IS AVAILABLE IN EITHER KIT FORM OR PRE-ASSEMBLED.

1977 THE 'TRINITY' ARRIVES, WITH THE APPLE II, TANDY TRS-80 AND COMMODORE PET ALL MAKING THEIR DEBUTS. IN ITS FIRST YEAR, SALES OF THE APPLE II REACH JUST 600.

1979 ATARI ENTERS THE HOME COMPUTER MARKET WITH THE RELEASE OF THE 400 AND 800 MODELS.

1980 THE SINCLAIR ZX80 IS LAUNCHED IN THE UK, AND IT'S THE FIRST PRE-BUILT COMPUTER AVAILABLE FOR LESS THAN £100. ACORN RELEASES THE ATOM, ITS FIRST HOME COMPUTER.

1981 THE ZX80 AND ATOM ARE REPLACED BY THE ZX81 AND BBC MICRO RESPECTIVELY. COMMODORE LAUNCHES THE VIC-20 AND PROMOTES IT AS A FAMILY COMPUTER.

1982 TWO 8-BIT HEAVYWEIGHTS ARRIVE IN THE SHAPE OF THE COMMODORE 64 AND ZX SPECTRUM.

1983 THE MSX COMPUTER STANDARD IS ANNOUNCED WHILE SALES OF THE COMMODORE 64 HIT 2 MILLION FOR THE YEAR. THE SPECTRUM BECOMES THE FIRST COLOUR COMPUTER AVAILABLE IN THE UK FOR LESS THAN £100.

1984 AMSTRAD ENTERS THE FRAY WITH THE CPC 464 COMPUTER. AFTER A SLOW START, THE APPLE II HITS ITS STRIDE WITH SALES OF MORE THAN 1 MILLION IN THIS YEAR.

1985 COMMODORE LAUNCHES THE 128 AS A SUCCESSOR TO THE MIGHTY 64. AMSTRAD RELEASES THE PCW 8256, THE FIRST OF ITS PERSONAL WORD PROCESSORS.

its BBC Micro. The classroom favourite was later overtaken by Amstrad's CPC range, which debuted in summer 1984. By early 1986, Amstrad had managed to claim 20 per cent of the UK home computer market. Sinclair was sitting pretty as market leader with a 40 per cent share.

That hefty wedge was almost exclusively down to the continued success of the Spectrum. But as we moved into the latter half of the Eighties, how much longer could this plucky 8-bit stay in the race? After all, its bare-bones, Z80-powered hardware was designed in 1981, and the intervening years had witnessed the emergence of faster yet affordable 16-bit processors. The Spectrum and its fellow 8-bits were trundling along in the slow lane and in danger of being overtaken.

SWEET 16-BIT

Home computers powered by 16-bit chips were nothing new. The Texas Instruments TI-99/4 was the first, and that dated back to 1979. Internally it was a bit of a bodge, though, and it wasn't able to outperform the 8-bits of the day. Then there was the IBM PC, which first rumbled into view in 1981. The early PCs were based around the Intel 8088, a 16-bit processor that utilised an 8-bit data bus. This concession allowed IBM to keep component costs down, yet the PC still weighed in with a heavyweight price tag – around $3,000 for the original 5150 model with monitor and disk drive. Apple, meanwhile, made the PC look like the deal of the century when it launched its Lisa machine in 1983. This serious piece of kit was powered by the 16-bit Motorola 68000 processor and featured a mouse-driven GUI. The cost: $10,000. Lisa's close relative, the Macintosh, arrived the following year and retailed at a more realistic $2,500.

Unsurprisingly, Sinclair watched this all unfold and set about developing a computer that would bring 16-bit power within easy reach of the man on the street. The result was the QL (Quantum Leap). Released in January 1984, the same month as the Macintosh, and sharing the same Motorola processor – albeit the 68008 version, which featured an 8-bit data bus rather than a 16-bit one – the QL was priced at just £400. It was relatively cheap, pretty damn powerful and appeared to tick all the right boxes, yet it was plagued by a series of hardware and software problems that took months to iron out and badly affected consumer confidence. It didn't help, either, that the QL was designed as a business machine first and foremost; the hardware was good at crunching numbers, not pushing pixels. In fact, when it came to playing games, the Spectrum was the superior machine.

Speaking to *Sinclair User* magazine, Sir Clive reflected on the QL failure with a surprising comment. "I wanted to do the QL on the Z80," he said. "The truth was there was nothing you could do on the 68000 that you couldn't do on the Z80. We haven't found a way to use the 68000 that gives any extra benefit to the customer."

NONPLUSSED

With its CPC, PCW and PC lines all selling strongly, Amstrad seemed to understand the home computer market better than most. But in 1990 it suffered a notable failure when the CPC Plus range failed to perform. So what went wrong? The upgrades to the CPC's ageing 8-bit architecture seemed like a plausible idea.

Amstrad's Cliff Lawson says: "The 464 Plus and 6128 Plus showed that simply bolting more graphics facilities onto an old 8-bit design was never going to be seen as an attractive proposition. The type of customer who was willing to pay top dollar was most likely to pay that bit extra to get access to 16-bit performance that no 8-bit was ever going to deliver.

"It's also easy to underestimate the amount of work in doing such a design. If you wanted graphics you got out your silicon design kit and developed a chip from the ground up. At Amstrad this was done by Steve Gane. It was a huge piece of work and sadly even then I don't think that the Plus machines were particularly appreciated."



» Despite its contemporary styling, the CPC Plus range failed to capture the public's imagination.

"The Spectrum and its fellow 8-bits were trundling along in the slow lane and in danger of being overtaken"

1986 – AMSTRAD ACQUIRES SINCLAIR, GIVING IT A 60 PER CENT SHARE OF THE UK COMPUTER MARKET. IT USES THE SPECTRUM TO BROADEN ITS RANGE AT THE LOWER END OF THE MARKET.

1989 – THE COMMODORE 128 IS DISCONTINUED WITH LIFETIME SALES STANDING AT 4.5 MILLION. THE GREAT 8-BIT HOPE, THE SAM COUPÉ, LAUNCHES IN THE UK.

1990 – MGT GOES INTO ADMINISTRATION FOLLOWING POOR SALES OF THE SAM. AMSTRAD LAUNCHES ITS UNSUCCESSFUL PLUS RANGE, WHICH INCLUDES THE GX4000 CONSOLE SPIN-OFF.

1992 – PRODUCTION OF THE ATARI 8-BIT AND SPECTRUM COMPUTERS IS STOPPED.

1993 – THE APPLE II AND BBC MASTER LINES ARE DISCONTINUED. COMMODORE CONTINUES TO PRODUCE THE C64, BUT SALES FOR THE YEAR ARE AT AN ALL-TIME LOW OF 175,000.

1994 – AFTER MONTHS OF UNCERTAINTY, COMMODORE DECLARES BANKRUPTCY AND ITS ASSETS ARE LIQUIDATED.



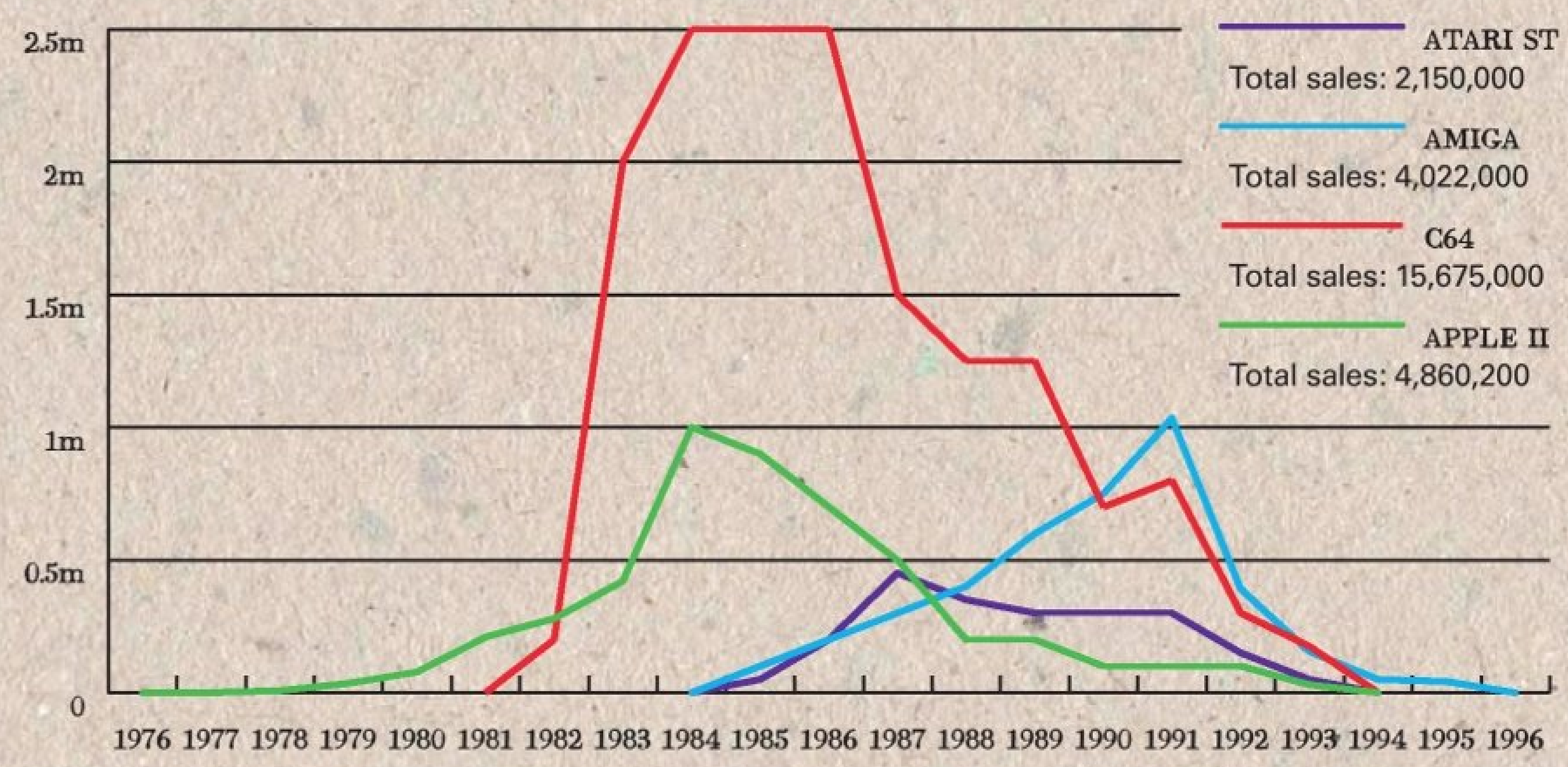
» [CPC Plus] Ocean's nifty racer *Burnin' Rubber* was bundled with the CPC Plus computers and GX4000 console.



» A positive review of the Sinclair ZX80 appeared in the well respected *Personal Computer World*.

ANNUAL SALES (8-BIT vs 16-BIT)

How sales of the Apple II and C64 compared to those of the 16-bit Atari ST and Amiga over 20 years



That might have been true at Sinclair, but it certainly wasn't a sentiment shared by its rivals. 1985 saw the launch of the Atari 520ST and Commodore Amiga 1000, two machines that finally opened people's eyes to the possibilities of the 68000 for gaming. By supporting the CPU with a number of custom chips, both computers offered super-fast performance and colourful, high-resolution graphics. A graphical OS and floppy disk drive also came as standard, and the amount of RAM was typically 512KB. Compared to their respective ancestors, the Atari 8-bit and the Commodore 64, the ST and Amiga were true next-generation machines.

The other manufacturers also opted for more powerful processors. In 1986, Amstrad used the 16-bit Intel 8086 chip in its first IBM PC-compatible, the PC 1512. It wasn't the first to clone the IBM PC – companies like Columbia and Compaq had been doing it as far back as 1982 – but it succeeded in making the PC more affordable. The PC 1512 cost roughly £1,000 less than an equivalent IBM model.

Also in 1986, Apple decided to supercharge its long-running Apple II line with a 16-bit update. The

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO...

For many people it was amazing 16-bit games that convinced them to upgrade their hardware. But not to be outdone, the 8-bits were home to some cracking conversions of 16-bit mega-hits



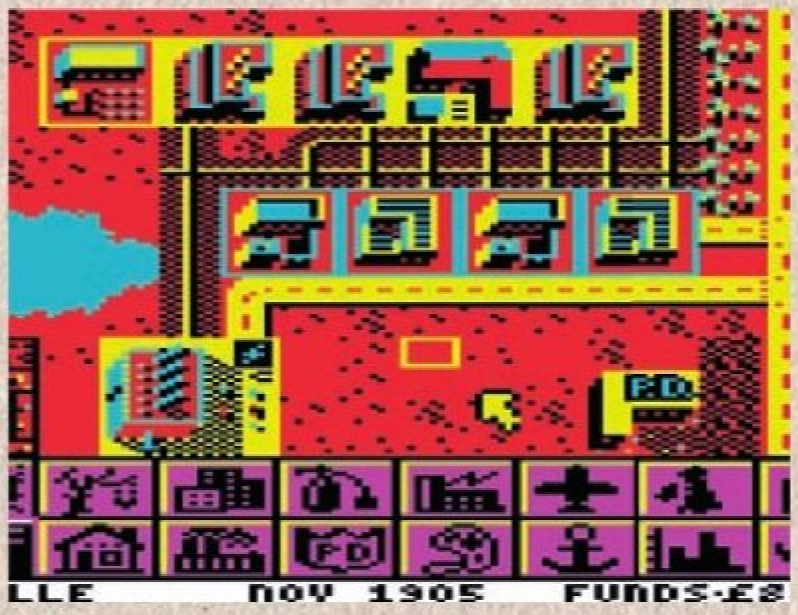
■ CARRIER COMMAND

Format: ZX Spectrum | Year: 1989
Realtime Games, behind the impressive Spectrum version of *Starglider*, outdid itself with this cracking conversion of its own 16-bit action-strategy title. The shaded vector graphics looked lovely and everything moved along at a decent clip.



■ SHADOW OF THE BEAST

Format: Commodore 64 | Year: 1990
Who'd have thought that Gremlin could turn out such a faithful version of this 16-bit showcase? The presentation is really something, with the original's parallax scrolling re-created, and the fact that it came on cartridge meant no loading times.



■ SIMCITY

Format: BBC Micro | Year: 1990
Programmer Peter Scott deserved to be knighted for shoehorning this classic simulation into the Beeb's 32KB memory. There are some features missing, as you'd expect, but that doesn't detract from what is a masterly piece of coding.

Apple IIGS was powered by the 65C816 CPU, which offered 16-bit capability while retaining almost complete compatibility with its 8-bit siblings. Then, in 1987, Acorn chose to leapfrog the 16-bitters completely by powering its new Archimedes range with a true 32-bit chip. Acorn's own ARM RISC processor was able to thrash the 68000 in the performance stakes, running up to four times as fast. With machines now available with so much raw processing power under the hood, was there any point in keeping the old 8-bits alive?

"Despite looking like yesterday's tech, manufacturers weren't about to call time on the 8-bit era just yet"

THE 8-BIT IN FLUX

Despite looking like yesterday's tech, manufacturers weren't about to call time on the 8-bit era just yet. Generally, the 8-bit stalwarts were repositioned as entry-level machines for those looking to get into computing for the first time. Advances in technology meant that the hardware could be re-engineered to improve reliability and reduce costs, as well as upgraded with extra RAM and additional features. In short, buyers were getting more machine for less money.

An excellent example of this was Atari's XE computers. The range was unveiled in 1985 at the same time as the ST and featured similar styling, to give the 8-bit line a 'baby brother' look. But there was more to them than sleek new cases, as they featured updated BASIC and an additional expansion port. The 130XE model also increased the amount of RAM to 128KB. Acorn followed a similar path by releasing the Model B+, which beefed up the memory of the BBC Micro to either 64 or 128KB. A further evolution arrived in 1986 with the introduction of the Master series. These computers, aimed largely at the education sector, featured an improved processor, more RAM (128KB minimum, plus separate video RAM), cartridge ports and increased hardware support. The later Master 512 model was even PC-compatible thanks to the inclusion of an Intel 80186 co-processor.

Following the failure of the QL, Sinclair wisely turned its attention back to the Spectrum. Like Atari and Acorn, it recognised that 128KB RAM was the new minimum standard and so brought the Spectrum 128 to market. Besides having more memory, the 128 also boasted an improved BASIC editor and a tuneful AY-3-8910 sound chip to replace the Speccy's rudimentary 'beeper'. Launching in the UK in February 1986, Sinclair aimed the 128 squarely at the games market, although it curiously neglected to add any joystick ports, so gamers needed to buy an additional interface. This oversight was soon corrected by Amstrad, which acquired the ailing Sinclair



■ LEMMINGS

Format: SAM Coupé | Year: 1993
SAM owners were promised this for years and it didn't disappoint when it finally arrived. Looking almost identical to the 16-bit version – save for a slightly narrower screen display – *Lemmings* showed what the SAM was capable of.



■ PREHISTORIK 2

Format: Amstrad CPC | Year: 1993
This conversion of the PC platformer was brilliant on the standard CPC, but an absolute blinder on the enhanced Plus computers. Fast and fun, and with top-notch presentation, it was one of the few games to really harness the power of the Plus.



LOKI HERE

New computer projects were continually in development at Sinclair, and of those that never made it, the most interesting was surely Loki. Billed as a 'Super Spectrum', this 8-bit was supposed to offer Amiga power for less than £200. *Sinclair User* lifted the lid on Loki in its June 1986 issue, revealing that the machine was to feature 128KB of RAM, a 512x256 pixel display, 256 colours, a blitter-style chip, synthesised sound and full Spectrum compatibility. The article claimed, in all seriousness, that Loki was "everything the Amiga should have been".

Crash magazine was quick to mock *Sinclair User* and said that Loki was clearly vapourware, yet Sinclair engineer Rupert Goodwins says there was some substance to it: "I remember seeing some of the video stuff working. It had genlock, video capture and a 12-bit palette, and it was going to be based around some stupidly fast Z80. The sound was also exceptional. It had some very smart musical engineers who knew a lot about synthesis."

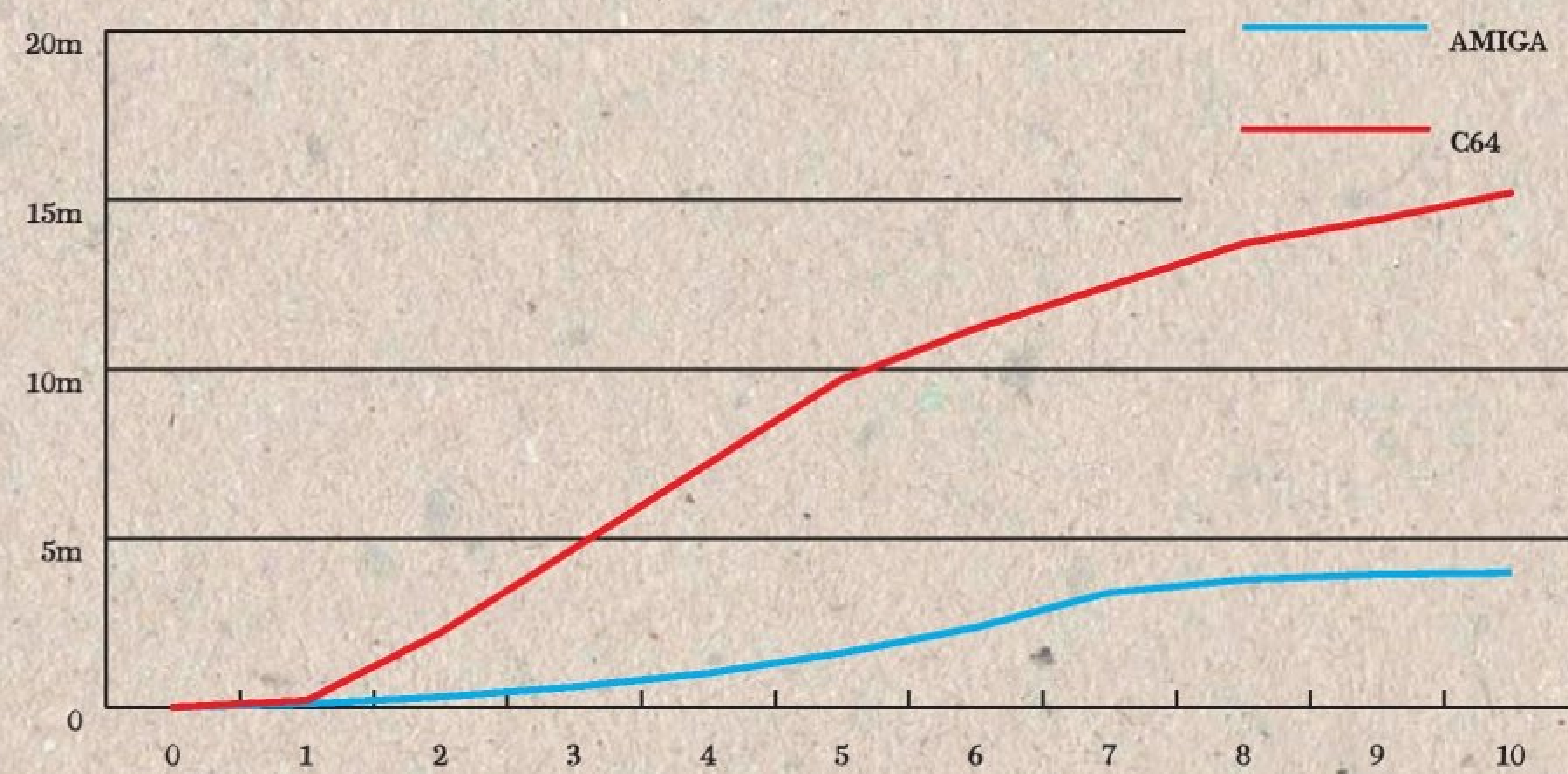
Despite much of Loki's hardware being prototyped, Rupert confirms that it was far from complete at the time of Amstrad's acquisition of Sinclair. Amstrad unsurprisingly chose to drop Loki and knock out Spectrum revisions instead.

» *Amstrad Action* was one of the longest-running 8-bit mags, lasting until June 1995.



CUMULATIVE SALES (C64 vs AMIGA)

The comparative sales growth of the Commodore 64 and Amiga computers over their first ten years



computer business in April 1986 and rushed out the Spectrum +2 as a complete, all-in-one computer along the same lines as the CPC 464.

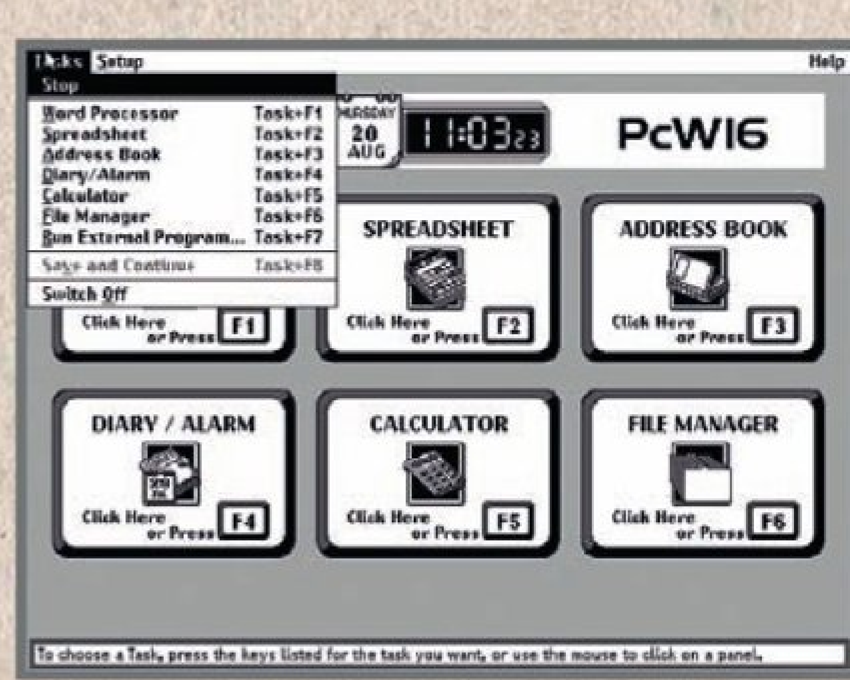
When it came to developing its CPC range, Amstrad looked to provide a feature that 16-bit users took for granted – disk access. The 464's tape drive was whipped out and replaced with an internal 3-inch floppy drive manufactured by Hitachi. The result was the CPC 664, which appeared in April 1985 and was soon superseded by the improved CPC 6128 model, which basically took the 664 and doubled its memory to 128KB.

The CPC's core hardware remained the same across the range, no doubt because Amstrad's engineers were busy manufacturing an entirely new 8-bit computer – one that would ultimately outlive and outsell the CPC. Prior to launching his PC-compatibles, Sugar observed that more and more people were using computers for word processing, but what was the point of forking out for an expensive, general-purpose PC if you were only going to use it as a fancy typewriter? The Amstrad boss spotted a gap in the market and promptly filled it with the rather odd-shaped PCW 8256. Launched in September 1985, the PCW was a Z80-powered computer with an integrated monochrome monitor and 3-inch floppy drive that was marketed as a dedicated word processor. It came bundled with word-processing software and a dot matrix printer, so all the user had to supply was A4 paper. All this was available for £450 – roughly a quarter of the cost of the lowest-specced PC at the time – and it was an instant hit, with sales of 350,000 in its first eight months. The PCW proved that there was still plenty of life left in the old Z80, and Amstrad capitalised on the success with a number of updated models, including the 8512 and 9512.

Apple was one of the first manufacturers to utilise the 68000 in its products, yet it continued to develop the 8-bit Apple II throughout the Eighties. It was positioned as its entry-level range while the Macintosh gained traction at the top end of the market. Despite the release of the 16-bit Apple IIGS

EASY AS ABC

It's revealing to look back at magazine circulation figures and see how the numbers rose and fell over the 8-bit era. Take *Zzap!64*, for instance. For the second half of 1985, the official ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulations) figure stood at 42,973. Two years later it had almost doubled to 82,933. Sadly, Newsfield didn't publish any later ABCs for the magazine, most likely because the numbers were on the wane. For *Amstrad Action*, Future Publishing posted a figure of 38,457 for the second half of 1988. Three years on and there was hardly any change at 37,120, but fast-forward to 1993 and the figure had fallen to 15,168. *Your Sinclair*, another Future title, reported an ABC figure of 78,393 for the first half of 1989, just ahead of EMAP's *Sinclair User*, with 76,055 for the same period. However, it is unofficially reported that, in 1993, the final few issues of *Your Sinclair* were selling just 3,000 copies.



» [Amstrad] The Amstrad PCW16 came with its own GUI, entitled 'Rosanne', and a suite of built-in office tools.

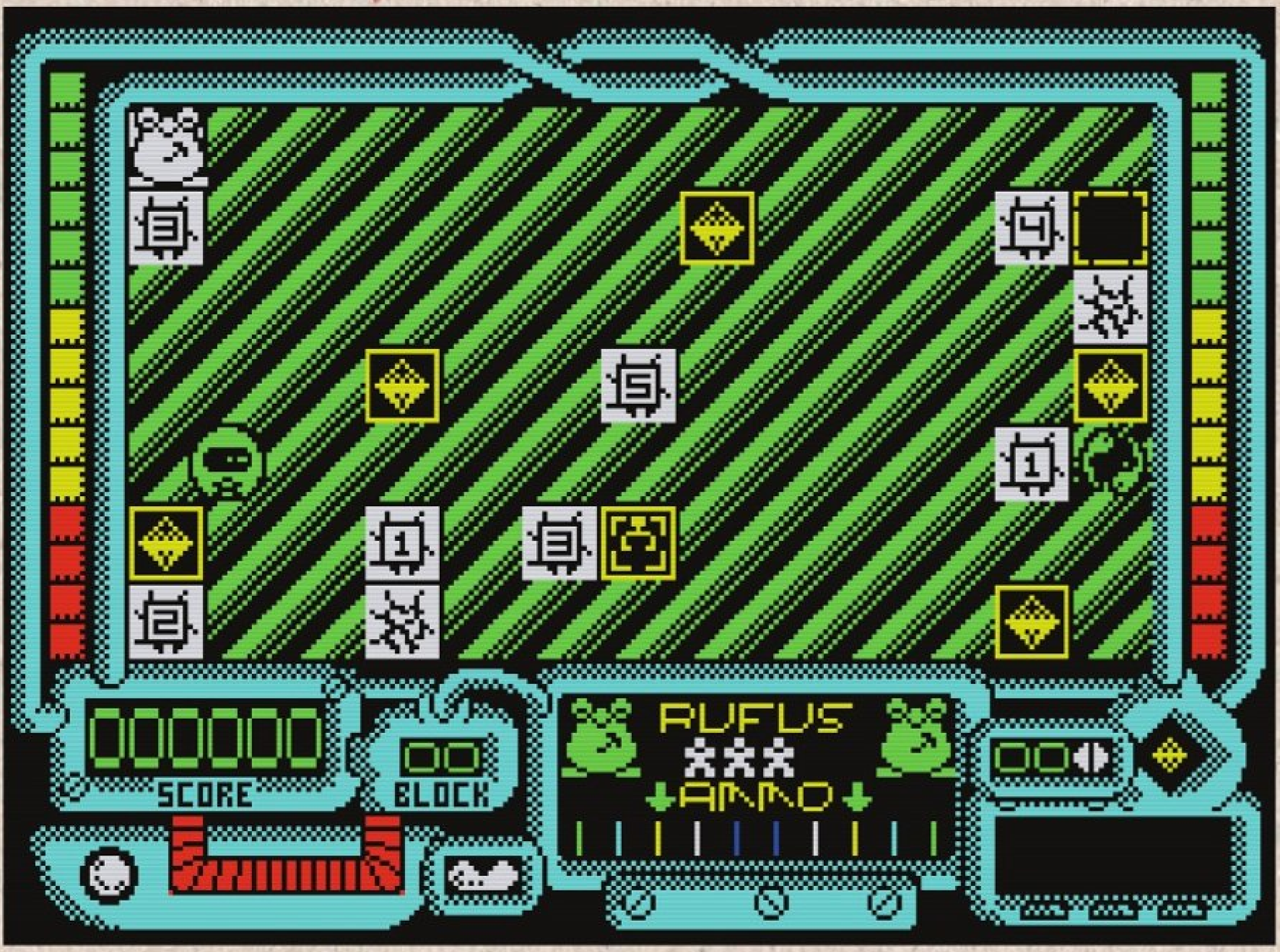
Geoff Brown



"The thing about the death of 8-bits is that there was such an outstanding graphical difference when you saw the two displays side by side. It was really as simple as that to the public.

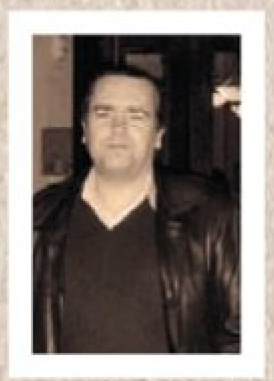
"I can't remember any particular product standing out in the changeover apart from *Flashback*, released in 1992. I was looking for new products and I came across a small French company called Delphine Software. I went to its offices in Paris and I was shown a demo of a new technique called 'rotoscoping'. I immediately spotted the potential and had a deal signed for the worldwide publishing rights.

"The only problem came when we realised that the cartridge size was going to be double any other we had manufactured, with the associated increased cost. I persuaded my board to go with the game as I loved it that much. Needless to say, it was a massive hit for US Gold."



» [Spectrum] Released in 1992, *Reckless Rufus* came at the tail end of the Spectrum's commercial life.

Jon Hare



"I realised it was all over for 8-bit computers around 1990. This year was our transition year at Sensible Software from C64 to Amiga. We did *International 3D Tennis* on both machines to hedge our bets. To be honest, Sensible moved from 8-bit to 16-bit slower than some other companies because we were very successful towards the end of the 8-bit era with *SEUCK* and *MicroProse Soccer*. However, to us the 16-bit era was a welcome change. We could make the same kind of games as the 8-bits, only deeper. The shift from 16-bit computers to consoles was a lot more drastic, as the introduction of full 3D graphics entirely changed the development process, making the whole emphasis extremely graphics-first.

"The really sad thing for me was the end of Commodore. The end of the 8-bit era was just a passing phase, but the end of Commodore signified the end of commercially viable games for home computers."

in 1986, Apple continued to manufacture the IIe (Enhanced) and IIc (Compact) models.

Commodore, meanwhile, left its monster-selling C64 largely untouched. There was the portable SX-64 and the cost-reduced, remodelled C64C, but neither added any new hardware features. Instead, Commodore widened its product range with additional 8-bits in a bid to provide a computer for every price bracket. 1984 saw the release of the Plus/4, a machine that was seemingly designed with productivity in mind rather than gaming, as it lacked the C64's excellent sprite and sound capabilities and came with built-in application software; the Plus/4 was not so much a leap forward from the C64 as a shuffle to the left. More successful was the Commodore 16, which was based on the same hardware as the Plus/4 and at least served a purpose as a cheap entry-level replacement for the ageing VIC-20.

Commodore needed a computer to sit somewhere in the gap between the C64 and the Amiga, and so in 1985 it brought out the Commodore 128. Unlike the Plus/4, this new machine was compatible with the C64 and capable enough to attract serious users. It featured 128KB of RAM, extended Commodore BASIC, an 80-column display, CP/M compatibility and an updated MOS processor that could run at twice the speed of the 64's. Although it supported the huge library of C64 software, the C128 was not designed with gaming in mind. It was a clever, powerful and flexible 8-bit aimed at the small business and home office market. In the UK it launched at £279, although you'd need to spend an extra £149 on a 1571 floppy disk drive to really get the most out of it.

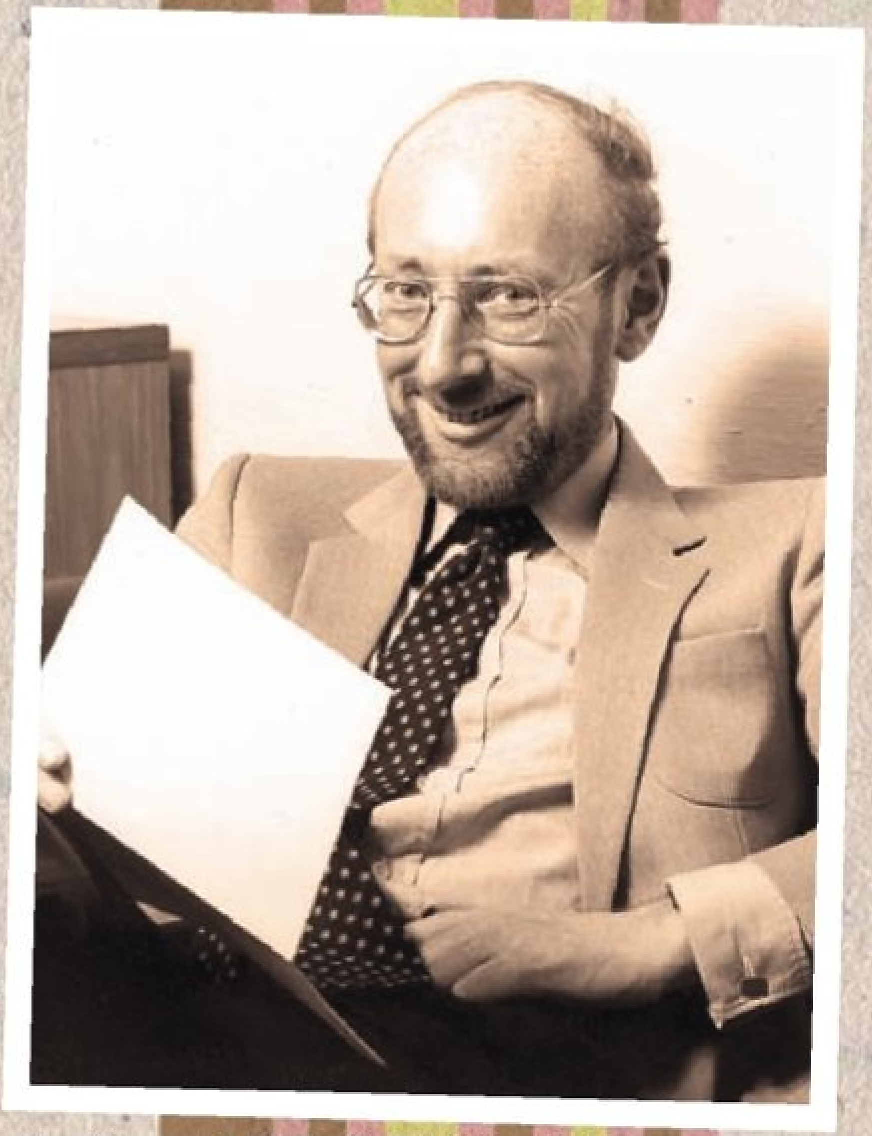
The problem was that by 1986 you could pick up an Atari ST for £399, and Commodore's own Amiga 500 launched in 1987 at £599. The kind of person who was willing to pay decent money for a new computer would surely opt for a new ST or Amiga instead. And that's pretty much what happened.

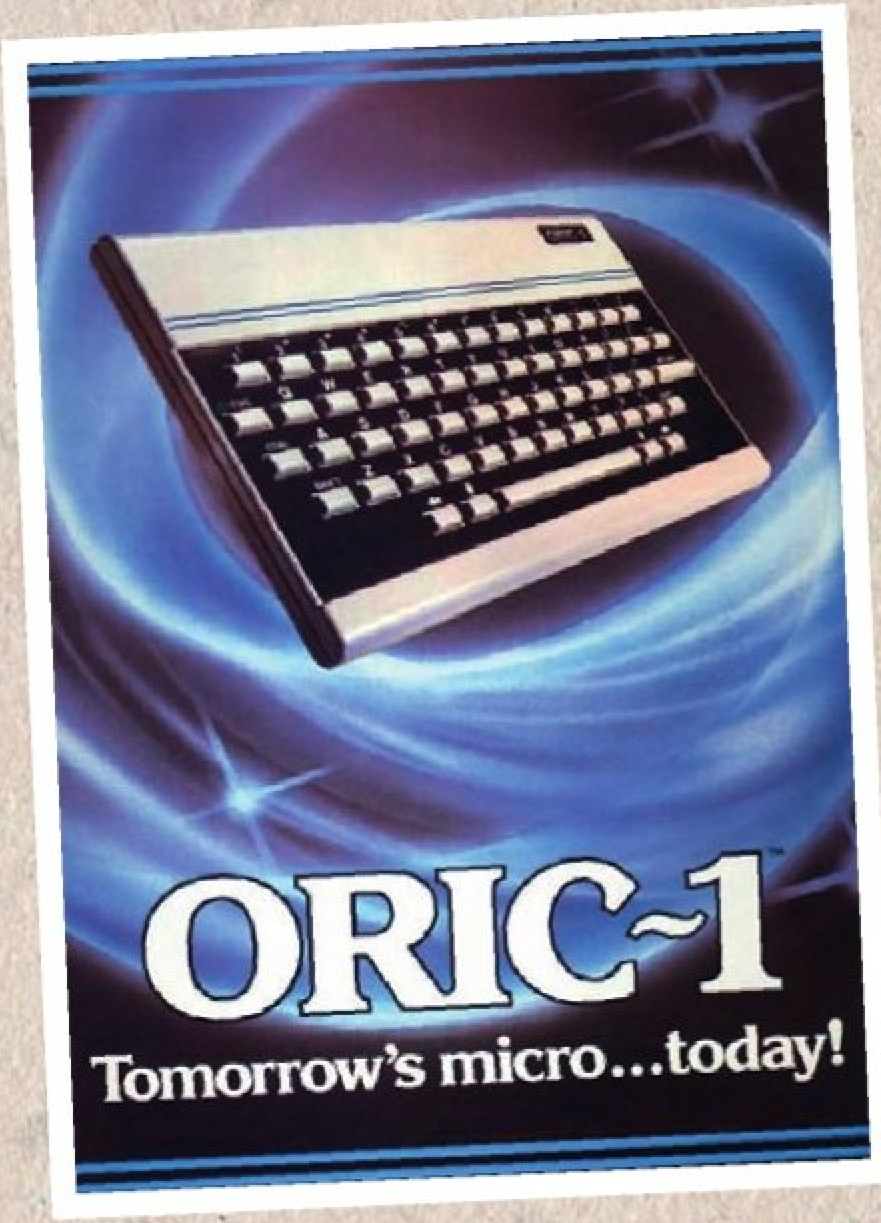
DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Consider this. In 1986, worldwide sales of ST and Amiga computers were neck and neck at 200,000 each, while the Commodore 64 was selling more than ten times that number. Yet just four years later, in 1990, the Amiga became Commodore's number one machine with sales of 750,000 compared to the C64's 700,000, with the ST trailing behind at 300,000. In 1991 sales of the Amiga peaked at more than 1 million, driven by the mightily popular mass-market Amiga 500, which had dropped in price to a more affordable £399, complete with a bundle of software.

At the turn of the decade, even the most ardent 8-bit fan must have found their allegiance wavering. If friends weren't inviting you over to show off their shiny new 16-bit machines then you only

"In 1990 the Amiga became Commodore's top machine, with sales of 750,000 compared to the C64's 700,000"


» The smile suggests that Sir Clive Sinclair is looking at the latest ZX81 sales report.



had to go inside a computer shop to see people crowding around gorgeous-looking games like *Shadow Of The Beast* and *Xenon 2*. And it wasn't just computers either, as the 16-bit console era was emerging, with the Sega Mega Drive blazing a trail. Earlier 8-bit home consoles such as the Atari 2600, Nintendo Entertainment System and Sega Master System were obviously available in Europe, but they never enjoyed the same levels of popularity as they did in other regions, largely due to the comparatively high cost of cartridges compared to computer games on tape and disk. However, the Mega Drive seemed to snare interest with its sophisticated styling and promise of arcade-quality gaming.

bundled with the SAM was poor and would only run around 60 per cent of Spectrum software.

The SAM Coupé's real killer, though, was a lack of interest from the major publishers. With the likes of Ocean, US Gold and Domark all choosing to see how the Coupé fared before they supported it, there were no hit games available to demonstrate the machine's potential. SAM sales never took off as predicted, and MGT was forced to call in the receivers in June 1990.

Despite the SAM's stuttering performance, Amstrad believed that there was still room in the market for a new 8-bit computer. However, Sugar wasn't about to make the same mistake as MGT when it came to software support, so in

"At the turn of the decade, even the most ardent 8-bit fan must have found their allegiance wavering"

One company that tried to stand in the way of the 16-bit stampede was Miles Gordon Technology (MGT). Realising that many Spectrum owners were looking to retire their old machines, MGT presented the SAM Coupé as a tantalising upgrade option. Here was an Z80-powered computer that completely belied its 8-bit status. It could compete with the Atari ST in the graphics and sound stakes, and yet it was compatible with the huge library of existing Spectrum software. And all this would cost just £150 – half the price of an ST. It sounded too good to be true and, of course, it pretty much was. The SAM actually launched in late 1989 at £170, and by the time you brought it up to the same spec as an ST by doubling the memory to 512KB and adding a disk drive and mouse, you'd have spent more than you would have on an actual ST. To make matters worse, the Spectrum emulator

early 1990 he gathered together the UK's biggest publishers and presented them with the CPC Plus range. The existing 464 and 6128 models would be replaced with new Plus versions that, while still able to run all of the older CPC software, featured additional graphics and sound hardware capable of competing with the 16-bit machines. Chief new video features included hardware sprites, smooth scrolling and a palette of 4,096 colours. The games that would tap into this extra power would come on cartridge, and with one eye focused on Sega and Nintendo, Amstrad would also release a cheap, console version of the Plus called the GX4000. This wasn't a new strategy as Atari had already tried it twice – first with the 5200 console, which was heavily based on the Atari 8-bit hardware, and later with the XEGS, which was essentially a 65XE computer repackaged as a console.

Simon Pick

"I had a number of indications that the 8-bit era was over. Firstly, when these people called 'designers' started appearing. I couldn't get my head around the fact that someone who couldn't program or draw was designing games. My second indicator was when it was no longer possible to make a game with one programmer, one artist and one level designer. More than three people on a project was surely extreme.

"It was very annoying to have a producer who would swan in and tell you how rubbish your game was. In the past it was okay to make rubbish games, cut corners and leave bugs around. Now everyone was getting all up tight if the game crashed or was dull or looked terrible. Didn't they know that games sold based on the quality of the box art? It seemed that now we had to give the consumers a quality game that was value for money. It was commercialisation gone mad."



OUT OF STRIDE

US Gold raised hopes of SAM Coupé owners everywhere when it announced that developing games for the supercharged 8-bit was a doddle. Speaking to *Your Sinclair*, US Gold's David Baxter said: "We're getting a very experienced programmer called Chris Brunning to produce a SAM version of *Strider* for us. Supposedly it'll only take two weeks using our existing Speccy code and ST graphics."

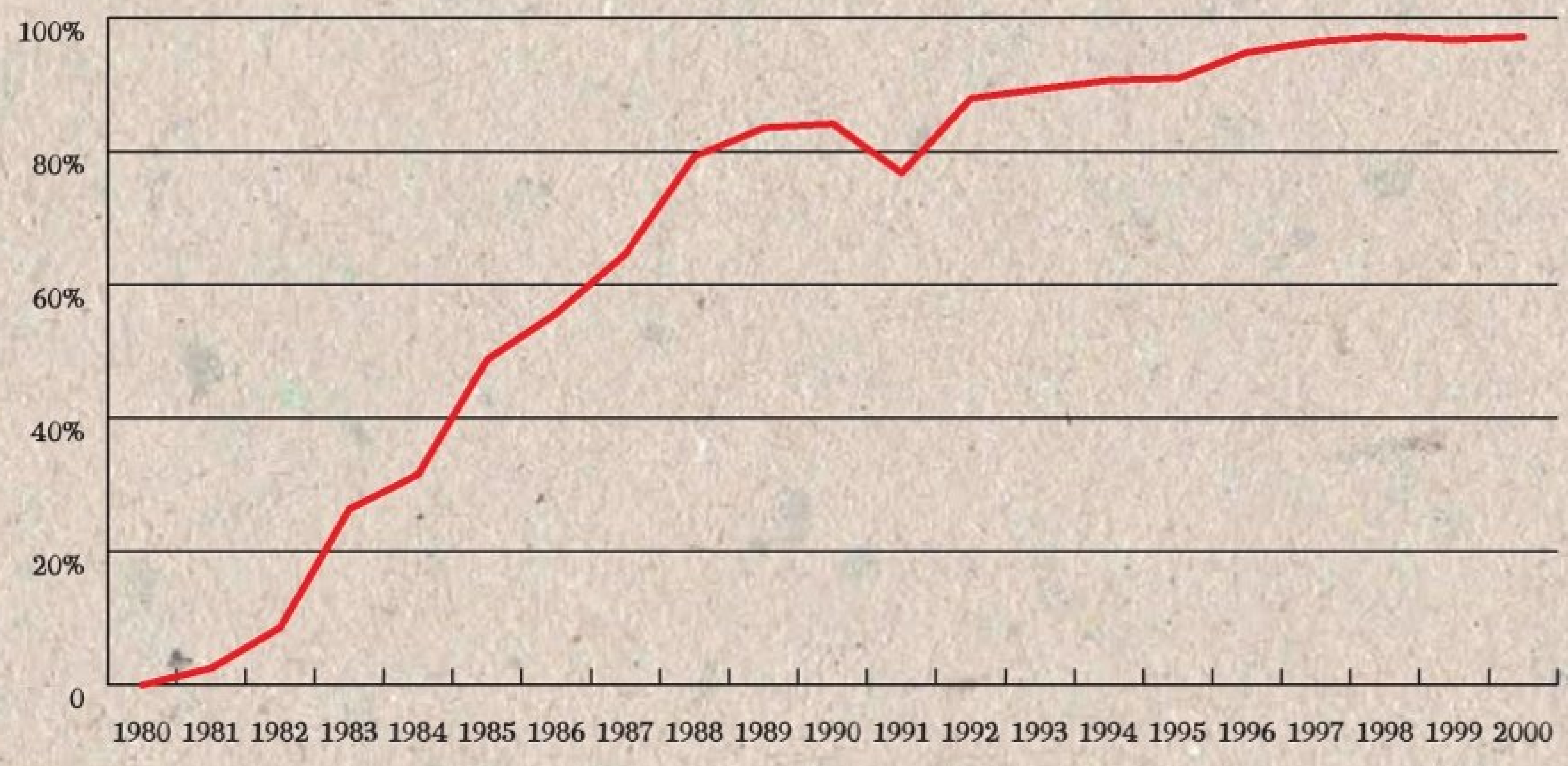


» [Atari ST] How would the SAM version of *Strider* have stacked up to the ST edition?

It sounded perfect: 8-bit code driving 16-bit graphics. But in the end, it wasn't to be and *Strider* was never released. We tracked down Chris Brunning to find out what happened. He says: "As I remember, there were plans to port *Strider* to the SAM but the machine bombed and I heard nothing more about it." So it never got past the planning stage, but what about this idea of rattling out the port in a fortnight? "I wrote the Spectrum version of *Strider* first and ported it to the CPC, so I would have used CPC code. I would have started with ST graphics and probably reduced the sprite sizes. Two weeks? Maybe not. A month? Probably."

PC MARKET SHARE

How skyrocketing sales saw the IBM PC and compatibles completely dominate the computer market



The CPC Plus range launched in September 1990 and within 12 months it was as good as dead. Around two dozen Plus games were released, but many of them were also available on the bog standard CPC with little or no differences. The carts were expensive too, retailing at £20-25. Amstrad was famous for knocking out products that punters wanted, but this was one occasion when its market research failed. With the 16-bit machines dominating, the Plus range wasn't even on most people's radars, let alone their wish lists.

Also overlooked was the Commodore 64GS, which was released in Europe in late 1990. Like the GX4000, this was essentially a 'consolised' version of the C64, and it quickly disappeared into obscurity. Commodore apparently wasn't done with 8-bits just yet, though, and in 1991 there emerged details of the Commodore 65. This brand new 8-bit computer was to remain compatible with the C64 while offering – you've guessed it – Amiga-like capabilities. Development of the C65 reached a fairly advanced stage and a number of prototypes were produced, but the project was quietly cancelled as Commodore chose to focus on developing its Amiga line instead. What could have been the most powerful, versatile 8-bit computer ever released is now just an incomplete curio in the hands of collectors.

END OF THE LINE

The early Nineties witnessed the surviving 8-bit production lines finally grinding to a halt. Atari was the first to act, calling time on its XE range in January 1992. Amstrad, having already canned its CPC operation following the failure of the Plus range, stopped manufacturing the Spectrum +2 in April 1992 – exactly ten years after the release of the very first rubber-keyed Spectrum. The +2 outlived the disk-driven +3 model, which was dropped in October 1990.

The BBC Master 128 was discontinued in April 1993 and the Apple IIe lasted until October 1993. Commodore was still cranking out C64s in 1994 and production would have continued were it not for the company declaring bankruptcy in April of that year. Outlasting them all, though, was the Amstrad PCW. The plucky word processor was manufactured for the best part of the Nineties, and Amstrad even introduced a new GUI-enabled model, the PCW16, in 1996. The '16' in the title was not the number of bits – it still used an 8-bit Z80 – but rather the clock speed of the CPU.

In total, Amstrad sold 8 million PCWs compared to just 3 million CPCs. Its PC range performed even better, with sales of 12 million. Those figures come as no surprise, as sales of IBM PCs and compatibles rose at a head-spinning rate. By 1986, the PC's worldwide computer market share was already at 50 per cent. By 1989, it had increased to a staggering 80 per cent. Commodore, Atari, Apple and the rest were left to fight it out for the remaining share.

The PC continued to dominate throughout the Nineties and cemented its status as the industry standard. The arrival of Windows 3.0 in 1990 made the platform easier to use, and the introduction of VGA and then 3D graphics cards turned it into a powerful gaming platform. Processor speeds continued to rise, hardware costs continued to fall, and by the turn of the millennium the PC was commonplace in millions of homes. IBM was often referred to as the industry's 800-pound gorilla, but that description better fits the PC itself, which ran amok and trampled pretty much every other computer in its path.

From a retro point of view, the upside of the PC's dominance is that there's a single platform on which we can emulate all of the machines in this article. Back in the Eighties there were so many different computers and competing standards, yet thanks to emulation it doesn't matter if a machine is Z80, 6502 or 68000, or if it runs BASIC, CP/M or DOS, or if it outputs four colours or 4,000. All that really matters are the rich software libraries, which are there to be explored and enjoyed.

Special thanks to Jeremy Reimer (**www.jeremyreimer.com**) for compiling and sharing personal computer sales and market share figures.

Simon Butler



"I was still working for Ocean on 8-bit product when a good friend, Steve Cain, asked me if I would join a new independent team he was putting together. The company was Frames Software and they were developing 16-bit product for Atari. Before I made any decisions I asked in a meeting at Ocean just when it would be making the move to the 16-bit machines. I received the rather bewildering answer that at no point would Ocean be moving to 16-bit product. I handed my resignation in within the week.

"I never saw any imminent demise for the 8-bit scene. I just leapt at a chance to work on machines that would stretch me more as a pixel artist. The Spectrum, Amstrad and C64 were great machines – for their time. I'm not even sure they died before their time. But they died and while some of us mourn them and some still have them to this day, things move on."

» [CPC] Despite the hardware having ceased production and the 8-bit market being all but dead, great games like *Star Driver* were still being released in 1994.





CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAPASCHIPS

DINOPARK TYCOON



While he may not have created the first ever simulation game, Will Wright is easily one of the most important pioneers of the genre, thanks to the likes of *Sim City* and *The Sims*. Bullfrog's *Theme Park* also helped put the genre on the map, and it's continually evolved ever since.

One of our favourites – if only because of its subject matter – is *DinoPark Tycoon* by Manley And Associates, which actually predated *Theme Park* by a good year, and tasked players with looking after various dinosaurs instead of mechanical rides.



INFO

- **SYSTEM:** PC DOS
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** MECC
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** 3DO, MACINTOSH

As would later be the case with *Theme Park*, *DinoPark Tycoon* is all about micro-management, but done in a fun way that makes it very accessible – in fact, there was a version specifically made for school children. You're given $5,000, which goes towards buying land, choosing dinosaurs, buying food, and hiring staff to look after your precious park. There are three types of available land to build on: Desert, Plains and Marsh. You soon learn that certain dinosaurs are more suited to a specific land type but, frustratingly, we've never found a way to mix the environments so you can't have different areas in your park.

Parks are only a specific size, so once you've selected your chosen area to buy you need to equip it with a fence, hire yourself some staff to keep care of everything from entertaining to general maintenance, feed your dinos and set some ticket prices. Once all of that has been taken care of, it's a simple case of sitting back and waiting for that cash to roll in…

Well, that's the theory, but as with many similar games, there's a delicate balancing act that needs to be constantly maintained in order to ensure that you get the best out of your park. As a result, you'll find yourself tweaking the diets and amount of food you feed your dinosaurs, haggling over ticket sales, and deciding on what advertising you should use to attract more customers. It's an enjoyable system that's helped by a relatively slick interface and plenty of handy prompts to ensure you never get too stuck.

Even if you do find yourself running out of brass, all is not immediately lost because it's possible to acquire a bank loan in order to keep your own personal Jurassic Park up and running. And you'll need it, because one thing you'll quickly discover about *DinoPark Tycoon* is that it's a tough old game. If you don't manage your resources carefully, it's all too easy to run out of cash and find yourself out of work. In fact, the slow way in which your park must initially grow is one of our biggest bugbears.

Even still, *DinoPark Tycoon* remains an enjoyable game, which helped set the groundwork for *Theme Park* and a host of similar games, including a selection of offerings based on the novel *Jurassic Park*.



» [PC] Parks start small, but can be filled with all manner of dinosaurs. Sell off older dinos to bring in larger specimens.



» [PC] If you try and buy too much land you'll soon realise that you can't keep anything on it.

PARK LIFE

Your instant guide to the world of DinoPark Tycoon



DINO DINER

This is where you go to buy food. All the dinos have different dietary requirements, so spend wisely.



GENERAL STORE

This is where you buy all the mundane equipment. Everything from fences to flyers can be bought from here.



DINO CITY

There are a large number of dinosaurs, and Dino City is where you buy them. Bigger dinos obviously cost more cash.



OFFICE

From your base, you can control ticket sales, visit the bank, consult the encyclopaedia, and much more.



DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT

You can't run a park without workers, so head here for everything from veterinarians to tour guides.



REAL ESTATE

At the beginning of the game you choose the type of terrain you want, and you can buy more land later.



» [PC] School versions of *DinoPark Tycoon* offered players a starting purse of $20,000 instead of the usual $5,000.

The History of Final Fight

Double Dragon may have made scrolling beat-'em-ups popular, but it was Final Fight that refined the genre. Damien McFerran joins Haggar, Cody and Guy for a whistle-stop tour of Metro City

Thanks to its prestigious series of one-on-one brawlers, Capcom has gained an enviable reputation among fighting fans – a reputation that endures to this day thanks to recent hits such as the superlative *Street Fighter IV* and the blissfully chaotic *Marvel vs Capcom 3*. However, before 1992's *Street Fighter II* came along and cemented the company's position as undisputed champion in arcades all over the globe, another title was happily gobbling spare change like a hungry freeloader at an all-you-can-eat buffet. What's more, it featured an unlikely trio of heroes, comprising a pretty-boy street punk, a pyjama-wearing ninja and a bare-chested mayor with a moustache so bushy it made Mario green with envy. *Final Fight* was unquestionably the coin-op hit of 1989, and it went on to spawn a series that made its way onto more hardware platforms than you might otherwise assume.

Not that Capcom's slap-happy coin-op was innovative – quite the opposite. Prior to the release of *Final Fight*, scrolling beat-'em-ups were commonplace in arcades all over the world. Classics such as *Renegade*, *Double Dragon* and *Golden Axe* had turned the genre into the biggest draw in the gaming world, offering multiplayer thrills that seemed to fit perfectly into the relatively short time that players would usually spend in front of a coin-op cabinet. Capcom had little scope for originality, so instead decided to blow the competition away with the finest visuals and the best gameplay the genre had ever witnessed.

This arcade hit, however, was very nearly known by a different name. According to designer Akira Nishitani, who we had the pleasure of interviewing way back in issue 37, his overlords at Capcom initially requested that the game be a sequel of sorts to the original *Street Fighter*, which launched in 1987. The game was demonstrated at trade



shows as *Street Fighter '89*, and proved to be a runaway success – so much so that Capcom wisely altered the moniker when it became clear that players would fail to see the connection between this amazing new side-scroller and the relatively dull one-on-one punch fest that came before it.

Much of the game's initial appeal came from the way it looked. *Final Fight* was one of the first titles to make use of the new Capcom Play System (CPS) arcade hardware, and proved the ideal way to show off its considerable talents. While other scrolling beat-'em-ups featured relatively small sprites, *Final Fight*'s bold cast of characters positively dominated the screen. Despite their impressive size and level of animation, Cody, Guy and Haggar proved to be a versatile bunch, incorporating grabs, throws, combination attacks and even special moves into their repertoire. The game offered a degree of control and complexity that simply hadn't been seen previously; being able to stun an opponent, grab them for a swift knee to the family jewels and then hurl them across the screen into other onrushing foes remains a signature feature of the franchise. Another shock was the sheer volume of characters present on screen at any one time; the sprites may have towered over those seen in rival games, but that didn't prevent the CPS hardware from handling the chaos with reassuring aplomb. Capcom's new title was a global smash hit, and there were few amusement centres that didn't possess a machine by the time 1990 rolled around.

Unsurprisingly, the game became a dead cert for conversion to home systems, and it was Nintendo that managed to secure first blood, much to the chagrin of Sega fans, who had gleefully swallowed up red hot rumours that the brawler was, in fact, destined for the Mega Drive. The SNES conversion was something of a mixed bag, however. While it managed to replicate the intense visuals of the game, the memory constraints of the humble 8-megabit cartridge meant that Guy was removed from the roster of playable characters. Also expunged was the industrial stage and its end-of-level boss Rolento, who would later achieve fame in Capcom's *Street Fighter Alpha* series. However, possibly the most crushing blow was the removal of the all-important two-player mode – the SNES port was a resolutely single-player affair.

Despite these shortcomings, it managed to capture the coin-op's distinctive gameplay and was generally well received by both the press and public alike. It also illustrated perfectly the immense graphical power of Nintendo's new console; visually, it was an amazingly close match to the CPS version, which was no mean feat when you consider that Capcom's arcade tech was still considered to be cutting-edge at the time.

It would be remiss of us to not mention at this juncture the curious history of *Final Fight*'s female antagonists. In the original arcade machine, players could happily slap about lady combatants known as Poison and Roxy – two identically dressed women with impossibly long legs and revealing clothing to match. Legend has it that when a Capcom USA staffer objected to the game's promotion of violence against women, his Japanese counterpart insisted that both characters were, in fact, 'newhalfs' – a Japanese term for transgender – and therefore, in his mind at least, removing the controversy. Although they were included in the Super Famicom edition of *Final Fight*, when the game was localised for Western release the notoriously jumpy Nintendo of America hastily replaced the two sprites with alternative male characters called Sid and Billy. Debate continues to rage even to this day regarding the gender of Poison and Roxy – a patently ludicrous situation that has only arisen because someone at Capcom thought it was poor taste to hit women but perfectly acceptable to beat up transvestites.

The deranged self-censorship didn't end there, however; the SNES port was subjected to other changes, albeit of a less drastic nature. Pick-up points bonuses in the shape of alcoholic beverages were removed, and end-of-level bosses Damnd and Sodom were rechristened Thrasher and Katana respectively. One of the more amusing alterations relates to the famous car destruction bonus round, where the player was tasked with smashing a vehicle to pieces in the shortest time possible. At the conclusion of the round, the owner of the car – a member of the Mad Gear gang, no less – appears and exclaims: "Oh my god!" In the neutered SNES localisation, his cry of sadness was changed to: "Oh! My car!" This goofy phrase has since passed into the realms of videogaming lore, and is often quoted online by savvy fans.

The SNES version may have fallen short of perfection, but devoted lovers of the coin-op didn't have to wait long for a truly faithful facsimile – although, unless you owned a Japan-only Sharp X68000 personal computer, you were out of

"There were few amusement arcades that didn't possess a machine by the time 1990 rolled around"





» [SNES] *Final Fight 2* restored the two-player mode missing from the SNES original but failed to find the same acclaim with gamers and critics.

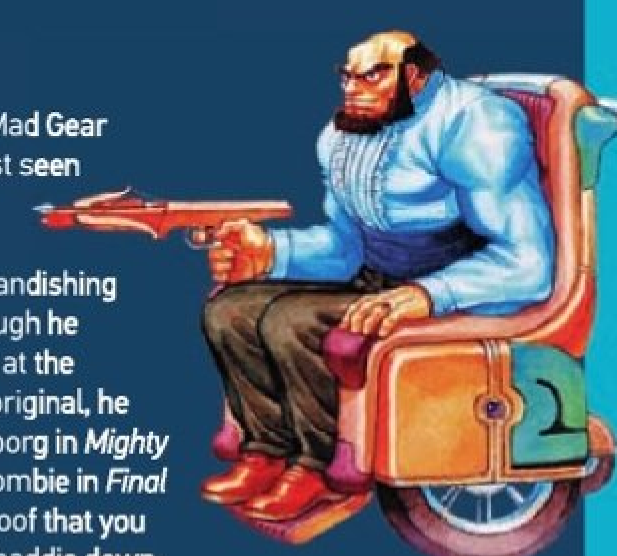


Memorable Bosses



Sodom

Although he wears a samurai helmet and carries katana blades, Sodom isn't actually Japanese. He's an American who is hopelessly in love with the Land of the Rising Sun. In some Western versions of the original, his questionable name is altered to 'Katana'.



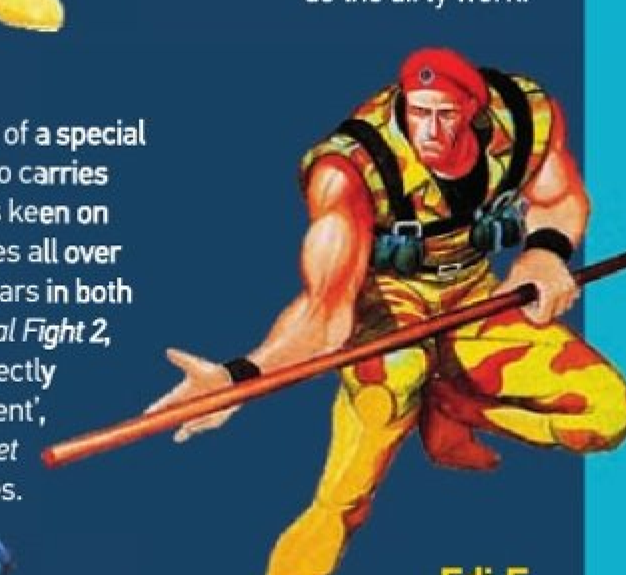
Belger

The leader of the Mad Gear gang, Belger is first seen driving around in a motorised wheelchair and brandishing a crossbow. Although he is technically slain at the conclusion of the original, he reappears as a cyborg in *Mighty Final Fight* and a zombie in *Final Fight Revenge* – proof that you can't keep a good baddie down.



Damnd

Your first boss is always going to be a memorable one, and the sight of the hulking, dreadlocked Damnd is one that will stay in the memory of many gamers. He's not especially hard to defeat, and this has much to do with his willingness to sit back and let his underlings do the dirty work.



Rolento

A former member of a special forces unit, Rolento carries a large stick and is keen on throwing explosives all over the place. He appears in both *Final Fight* and *Final Fight 2*, where he is incorrectly referred to as 'Rolent', as well as the *Street Fighter Alpha* series.



Edi E

A corrupt cop who uses a revolver to administer rough justice to our heroes in the original *Final Fight*, Edi E is the game's first truly difficult boss. He would later attempt to reform his ways and make an appearance in the lamentable *Final Fight Revenge* as a playable character.

The History of Final Fight

Street Fighter vs Final Fight

WHEN YOU CONSIDER that *Final Fight* was very nearly launched as a sequel to the original *Street Fighter*, it should come as no surprise to learn that the two franchises have enjoyed a long association over the years. 1995's *Street Fighter Alpha* saw Guy and Sodom cross over to the *Street Fighter* universe, and the 1996 sequel added Rolento to the mix, as well as an exclusive *Final Fight*-themed battle stage. By the time the third *Alpha* game hit arcades in 1998, Cody was ready to test his mettle also – albeit in prison clothing as he found himself on the run after being banged-up for his vigilante exploits. Maki, the female ninja from *Final Fight 2*, also broke free of her side-scrolling bonds, but instead of appearing in a *Street Fighter* title, she was given a starring role in *Capcom vs SNK 2*. Curiously, Mike Haggar has never appeared as a playable *Street Fighter* combatant.



luck. Launched in 1992, the X68000 version was impressively faithful to the original, save for some different music and a slight drop in the number of enemies on screen. Sadly, the rare nature of the host platform and the lack of a release outside Japan prevented this commendable port from achieving lasting fame. In the same year, Capcom attempted to make amends to Nintendo fans by re-releasing the Super Famicom version with Guy in place of Cody, but it was still unable to include the two-player option, making the release one for purists only. *Final Fight Guy* remained a Japan exclusive until 1994, when Blockbuster inexplicably launched it as a rental-only title in North America.

Around the same time, US Gold was busy doing what it did best by adapting *Final Fight* for the vast range of personal computers available on the European market. Predictably, the quality of these conversions varied wildly, with the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga editions proving to be the most faithful to the coin-op in graphical terms, but the 8-bit Spectrum effort managing to capture the hard-hitting gameplay more succinctly. In truth, none of these ports really managed to replicate the essence of Capcom's classic game. That task would fall to the talented folks at Sega.

» [X68000] The Japan-only X68000 offering was an incredibly close conversion when compared to the SNES port.



“ The 8-bit Spectrum effort managed to capture the hard-hitting gameplay more succinctly than other home computers ”

Mega Drive fans may have been annoyed at missing out on one of the biggest coin-op hits of recent memory, but their disappointment didn't last for long. In 1993 Sega hastily acquired the rights to port *Final Fight* to its new Mega-CD add-on, and in doing so created what is still regarded by many fans as the best ported edition of the game not based on emulated code. The vast storage capacity of the compact disc medium allowed the developers to include all three protagonists and the industrial level that had been so cruelly omitted from the SNES port. As if that wasn't enough, a new time attack mode was included, as well as arranged versions of the original music, newly recorded voice acting and a vastly improved introduction sequence. Just to rub salt in the wound of SNES owners, the simultaneous two-player option was also reinstated. Only some slightly washed-out visuals sullied the experience – an unfortunate drawback caused by the system's low selection of on-screen colours. Interestingly, the infamous Roxy and Poison survived the Western localisation this time around, although they were gifted with less-revealing clothing in order to protect their modesty.

The intense smugness of Sega fans didn't last, however. In the same year Capcom finally managed to give SNES owners a taste of multiplayer mayhem, although perhaps not in the manner many would have wished for. *Final Fight 2* was the first true sequel to the original game and retained the services of Mike Haggar, but both Cody and Guy were shown the door. In their place came the sword-



Keeping Up Cameo Appearances



SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS / MUSCLE BOMBER (1993)

When Capcom decided to create its own wrestling title, it was almost a given that the mayor of Metro City would come out of retirement and stalk the squared circle once more. Haggar uses the skills that brought him victory in the *Final Fight* series to battle opponents in the ring, putting his eye-watering piledriver to excellent use.



STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3 (1998)

Guy, Cody, Rolento and Sodom all feature in this excellent one-on-one fighting game. The final instalment in the much-loved *Street Fighter Alpha* prequel timeline, set before *Street Fighter II*, this 1998 release sees Cody fighting in prison gear and would go on to inspire his role in the more recent *Super Street Fighter IV*, where Guy also appeared.



SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS' CLASH (1999)

The Neo Geo Pocket Color's answer to *Pokémon*, albeit not quite as successful, *Card Fighters' Clash* boasts many cameo appearances from Capcom and SNK properties both old and new. Several members of the *Final Fight* brigade are on board, and the detailed artwork lends them an entirely new dimension.



STREET FIGHTER III: 2ND IMPACT (1997)

Feisty enemy Poison – who Capcom cheekily branded as a transsexual when people complained that the original game promoted violence against women – is seen at the side of the giant Hugo, who looks a lot like the Andore brothers from *Final Fight*, serving as his manager.

wielding Carlos and female ninja Maki. Despite their differing appearances and the presence of Carlos's bladed weapon, the two new additions felt very similar to the characters they had usurped. In fact, the entire game played very much like a less-interesting retread of the original, with the sinister Mad Gear gang once again taking the role of the bad guys. This time the battle was not confined to Metro City and instead took place all over the globe, including an unusually mountainous Holland, but in spite of the international flavour, the game was cursed with a curiously lacklustre quality. *Nintendo Magazine System* was especially critical, dubbing it "the biggest disappointment ever" and "an absolute waste of good plastic" in its review. That judgement may have been a little harsh in hindsight, but there was no escaping the sentiment that Capcom's long-awaited sequel wasn't up to scratch.

1993 proved to be a goldmine of *Final Fight*-related escapades, as Capcom also gifted the increasingly marginalised 8-bit NES ownership with a port of their very own. As you might expect, *Mighty Final Fight* didn't attempt to re-create the large, bold sprites of the coin-op but instead utilised squat, super-deformed combatants. It may have looked markedly different but it managed to retain a surprising amount of the coin-op's classic gameplay, and even scored one over the SNES port by including all three main characters – although the two-player mode remained tantalisingly out of reach. *Mighty Final Fight* also offered a unique experience system, where your energy bar would slowly increase as you battled your way through the Mad Gear hordes. Something of a little-known gem in the NES catalogue, the game was later ported to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance as part of 2006's equally overlooked *Capcom Classics Mini-Mix* collection.

After an absence of two years, Mike Haggar once again returned to the crime-ridden streets of his beloved Metro City to star in one of the most controversial instalments in the *Final Fight* lineage. *Final Fight 3* (released as *Final Fight Tough* in Japan) attempted to claw back some respectability for the scrolling beat-'em-up genre, which was being cruelly ignored in the wake of *Street Fighter II*'s rampant popularisation of the one-on-one brawler. *Street Fighter*-style special moves were introduced, allowing

The History of Final Fight

characters to perform various supernatural feats. The all-important two-player mode was retained from *Final Fight 2*, but this time around burgeoning cartridge ROM sizes allowed Capcom to include not three but four different heroes. Haggar and Guy make a return, with female cop Lucia and street punk Dean joining the fray.

Final Fight 3 certainly had the ingredients to be the definitive SNES beat-'em-up, but at the time of release it garnered a somewhat lukewarm reception from sectors of the gaming press. *Super Play* was especially scathing, awarding the game a disappointing 49% in the May 1996 issue. *C&VG* was similarly unimpressed, rating it 57%. These negative feelings were not reflective of the entire industry, however; other reviews cited it as one of the last great titles for the ageing 16-bit format, although the small production run probably didn't help it gain the attention it deserved. In Japan, *Final Fight Tough* remains an obscenely rare and expensive release, despite its sketchy reputation.

The indifferent reception given to the third SNES *Final Fight* outing probably shouldn't come as a surprise. 1995 marked something of a change in the tastes of the gaming public, with 32-bit consoles like the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn doing their utmost to convince everyone that 3D was the future, and as a result the once-dominant side-scrolling beat-'em-up suffered a sudden loss of credibility. It was clear that gamers were starting to lose interest and that the one-on-one fighter was the undisputed king of the coin-op. Capcom hadn't completely forgotten about Mike Haggar and his Metro City chums, but when the decision was finally made to release a fresh instalment in 1999, it was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a 3D head-to-head fighter rather than a 2D side-scroller.

Final Fight Revenge is widely regarded as one of the worst entries in the entire series, but this probably has quite a bit to do with the fact that few people have actually played it. The coin-op version was rarely seen outside Japan, and the only home conversion was for the Sega Saturn – in fact, it was the last game ever published for the ailing system. Instead of hand-drawn 2D sprites, *Final Fight Revenge* used 3D characters, taking inspiration from the likes of *Virtua Fighter* and Capcom's own *Rival Schools*. The biggest problem with the game was that it was disappointingly clunky to play, with little scope for skill. Players could pick up and use a wide range of weapons scattered throughout the arena, but bizarrely these armaments dealt out only moderate amounts of damage. Still, for all its failings, *Final Fight Revenge* did at least have a wicked sense of humour; some characters boasted truly strange special attacks, and series favourite Poison even pole-danced when she – or is it he? – won a match. Alas, history will remember *Final Fight Revenge* as a disaster; it simply wasn't the type of game that fans wanted to play.

Thankfully, this wasn't to be the end for Cody and company. A couple of years later, Capcom decided it was time to resurrect the game that started it all. *Final Fight One* was launched on the Game Boy Advance in 2001, and was basically an updated edition of the original coin-op. All three playable characters were included, as was the two-player mode – as long as you had a link cable and two copies of the game, of course. Capcom attempted to spruce things up with a save game feature, unlockable versions of Guy and Cody in their *Street Fighter Alpha* guises, and even portrait artwork for the numerous dialogue sequences. With the exception of the last addition, as the new artwork was overwhelmingly goofy, everything went according to plan, and lucky GBA owners got the game that SNES players really should have been playing a decade earlier.

Conversion Capers

FINAL FIGHT (SPECTRUM, 1991)

Just one of the many US Gold home computer ports in the wake of the coin-op's success, this 8-bit edition manages to outperform the Amiga and ST ports in terms of gameplay. The sprites are massive and the action is pretty faithful, putting the abysmal C64 edition to shame.



FINAL FIGHT (C64, 1991)

Oh dear. The C64 may have had a few more colours under its belt than the rival Spectrum, but the low-resolution graphics, tiny sprites and almost unrecognisable gameplay conspire to make this conversion a truly dreadful waste of everyone's time.

WORST



FINAL FIGHT (SNES, 1990)

Arguably the most famous port of all, which is ironic when you consider that it's woefully incomplete as it lacks one playable character, an entire level and, most importantly, the two-player mode. Despite this, it's fondly remembered as a gorgeous launch title.



FINAL FIGHT CD (MEGA-CD, 1993)

Although it lacks the vibrant colour of the SNES port, this Mega-CD release makes up for it by including everything that was missing in the Nintendo version, and then some. One of the format's true must-have purchases, and a fantastic conversion courtesy of Sega.

BEST



FINAL FIGHT ONE (GBA, 2001)

Final Fight in your pocket was more than many people dared hope for back in 2001, but this portable version vastly exceeded expectations. Although the visuals are slightly blocky, the majority of the arcade edition has been carried over faithfully.





» [SNES] The third *Final Fight* game arrived just as the PlayStation and Saturn were hitting store shelves, and suffered as a result.

It would be five long years before *Final Fight* fans got another game to dote over, but it was to be a thoroughly bittersweet experience. For all the hate and bile that has been thrown in the direction of *Final Fight Revenge* over the years, it pales into insignificance when compared to the fate that awaited the next original instalment in the lineage. Developed in the US by Capcom Digital Studios – the same team that handled *Revenge*, no less – *Final Fight Streetwise* was an obvious attempt to pander to the tastes of the time; it boasted a tiresomely predictable urban soundtrack, a hard-hitting storyline regarding drug addiction, and visuals so gloomy and gritty that just playing it made you feel like mixing up a lethal cocktail and putting an end to your wretched existence.

“Final Fight Streetwise made you feel like mixing up a lethal cocktail and putting an end to your wretched existence”

Final Fight Streetwise featured Cody's hitherto unknown younger brother Kyle as the main character and boasted a story mode, which involved participating in underground fist fights to earn cash and experience. Other links to the original game were in evidence, too – the main bad guy was revealed to be none other than the sibling of *Final Fight*'s primary antagonist, Belger. Despite these welcome nods to the past, there was little in the game to make it worth experiencing, aside from an emulated edition of the original coin-op. It says much about *Final Fight Streetwise*'s standing in the gaming world that series co-creator Akira Nishitani didn't even know the game existed until we pointed it out to him during our aforementioned interview.

It's hardly surprising that, in the wake of the crippling apathy shown towards *Final Fight Streetwise*, taking the series a step further wasn't top of Capcom's 'to do' list. The residents of Metro City were forced to lay dormant, with only brief appearances on Capcom's retro collections for consoles such as the PS2, Xbox and PSP. Thankfully, it's impossible to keep a good moustached, wrestling mayor down for long, and in 2010 an arcade-perfect rendition of the first game was released on Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network alongside fellow Capcom coin-op *Magic Sword*. *Final Fight: Double Impact* turned out to be an augmented edition of the original title with online play, graphical filters – including one that made it appear as if it were being played through an authentic arcade monitor, complete with scan lines and a curved CRT display – and unlockable rewards, such as artwork and comics. It currently represents the finest way to experience the first game, short of owning the arcade PCB.

And that brings us bang up to date. Aside from repackaging vintage instalments for download services such as XBLA, Virtual Console and PSN, it's hard to see where Capcom can take the series from here. Attempts to bring the side-scrolling fighter into the modern era have been dismal failures – take the gloriously cack-handed 360 and PS3 title *Golden Axe: Beast Rider* as an example – and the sad fact is that the average player these days – who, lest we forget, probably hasn't even played an arcade machine in their life – expects much more from the software they purchase than a repetitive beat-'em-up designed purely to guzzle your coins. However, we're eternally hopeful that one day our intrepid Metro City vigilantes will step out in an all-new adventure, and finally put to rest the grim memory of the more recent instalments.



CPC The Collector's Guide

David Crookes looks at why Lord Alan Sugar's 8-bit computers had a certain je ne sais quoi







AMSTRA

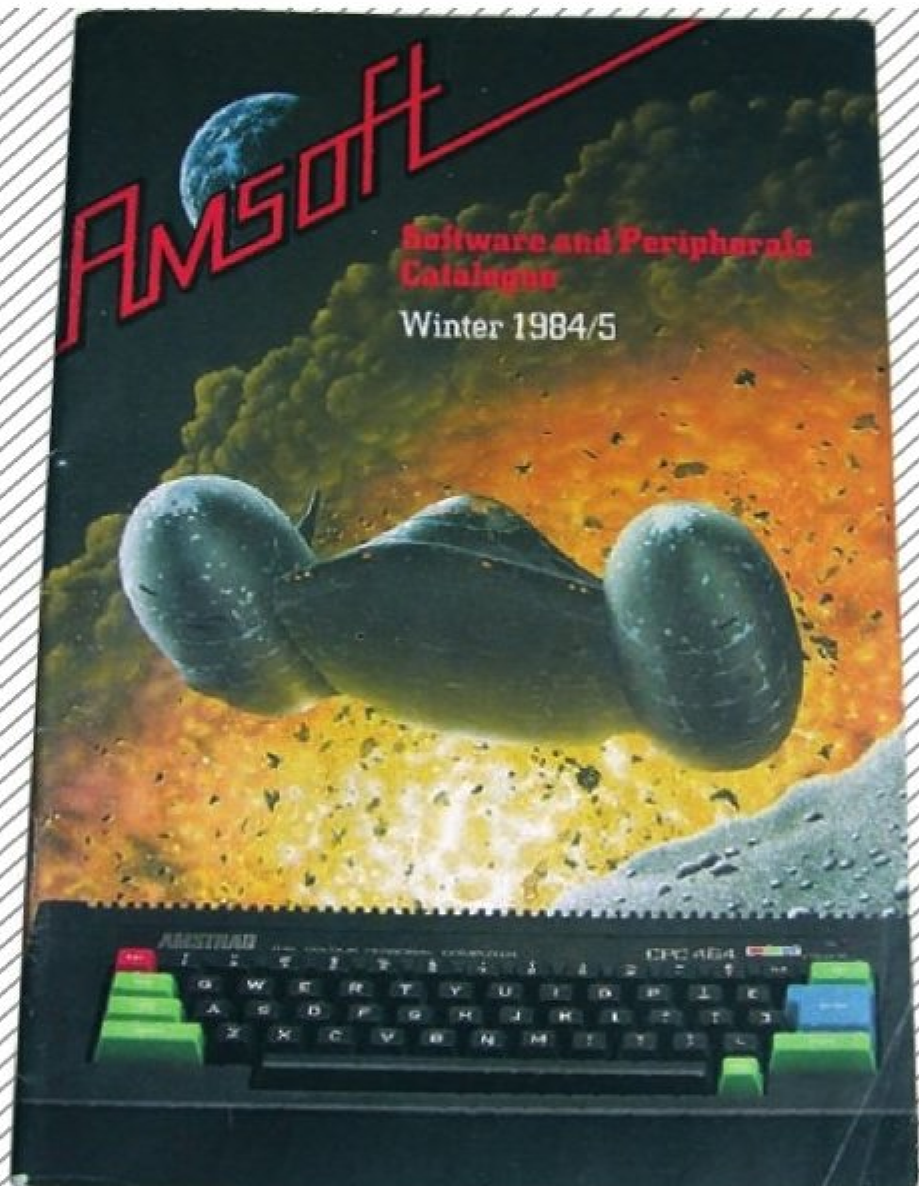


» **Manufacturer:** Amstrad » **Models:** Amstrad CPC/Amstrad Plus » **Launched:** 1984/1990 » **Country of Origin:** UK

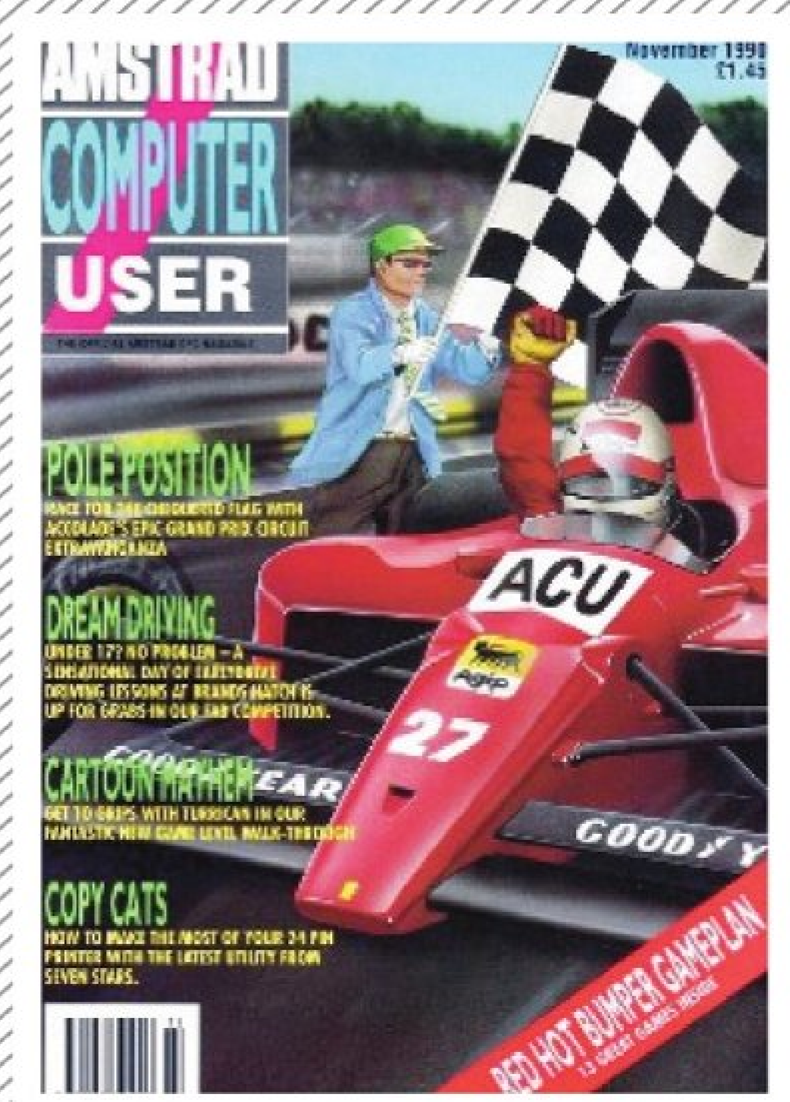
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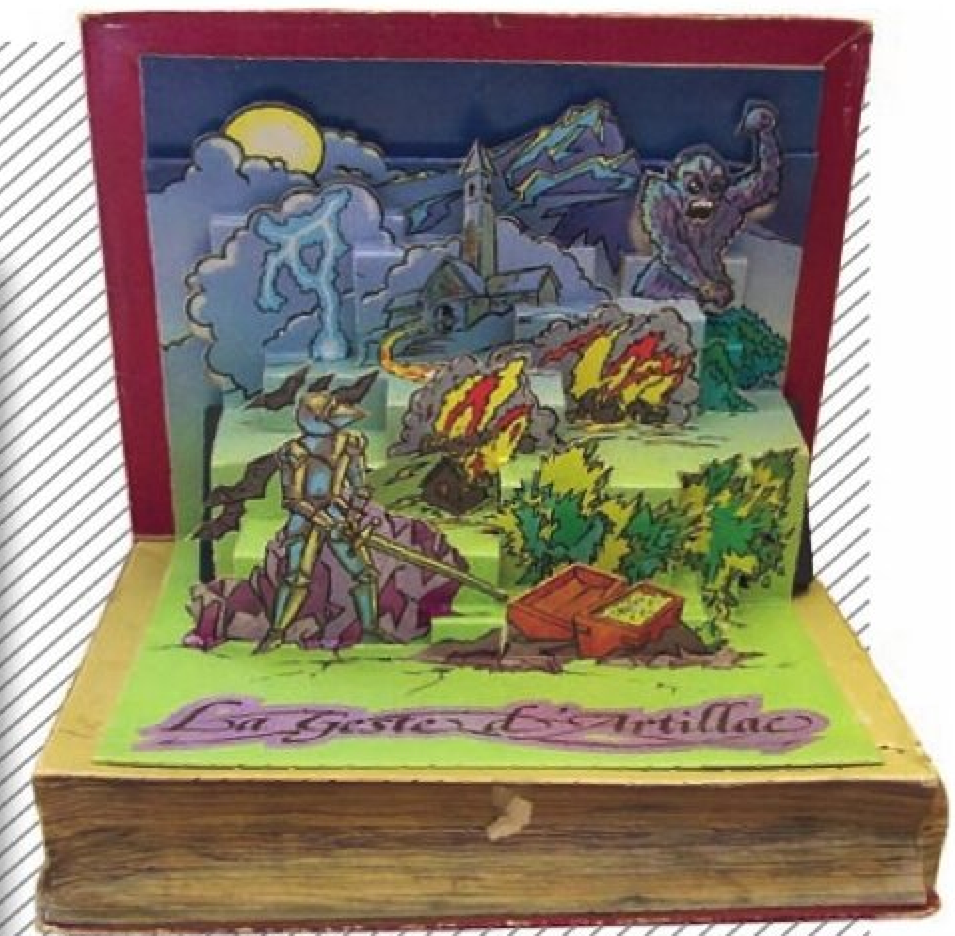
AMSTRAD

CPC The Collector's Guide



» Amstrad's own software division, Amsoft, published a host of games.







» The Amstrad CPC used 3-inch disks, which were more expensive than 3.5-inch and 5.25-inch ones.





WHY IT'S COLLECTABLE

Often shot down as "that other 8-bit computer", the range of Amstrad CPC machines has just as much, if not more, to enthral any videogame enthusiast. While there is no doubt that its contribution to gaming is starkly overshadowed by the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum, the CPC has more than a few surprises beneath its gun-grey exterior.

Many games started life on the Amstrad CPC, and some of those were exclusive to the machine for a short spell, until their popularity ensured that developers ported them to other computers. Titles such as *Get Dexter!*, *B.A.T.*, *Purple Saturn Day* and *Super Cauldron* fall under this banner. The Freescape system, which can be seen in titles ranging from *Driller* and *Dark Side* to *Castle Master* was developed on a CPC. The Oliver twins produced the *Dizzy* games on an Amstrad too. But, despite these contributions, still vitriol is aimed at the machine. A thread on the **Retro Gamer** forum in 2007 entitled 'Things you never knew about the CPC' suggested, "If you drop them from a great height, they don't bounce," and that "they make great paperweights". Perhaps they do. Yet dismiss this UK computer – Amstrad's first foray into personal computing – at your peril.

In France, gamers took the machine to their hearts. By the time the original CPC range of computers was coming to the end of its manufacturing life in 1990, it had sold more than 650,000 units and had taken more than 50 per cent of the market; games for the CPC sold as many copies as all the other formats put together. Although the CPC 464 with its cassette drive was popular in Britain, the French preferred the disk-based CPC 6128 and, to a far lesser degree, the short-lived 664, and more than 80 per cent of games sold were on 3-inch floppy.

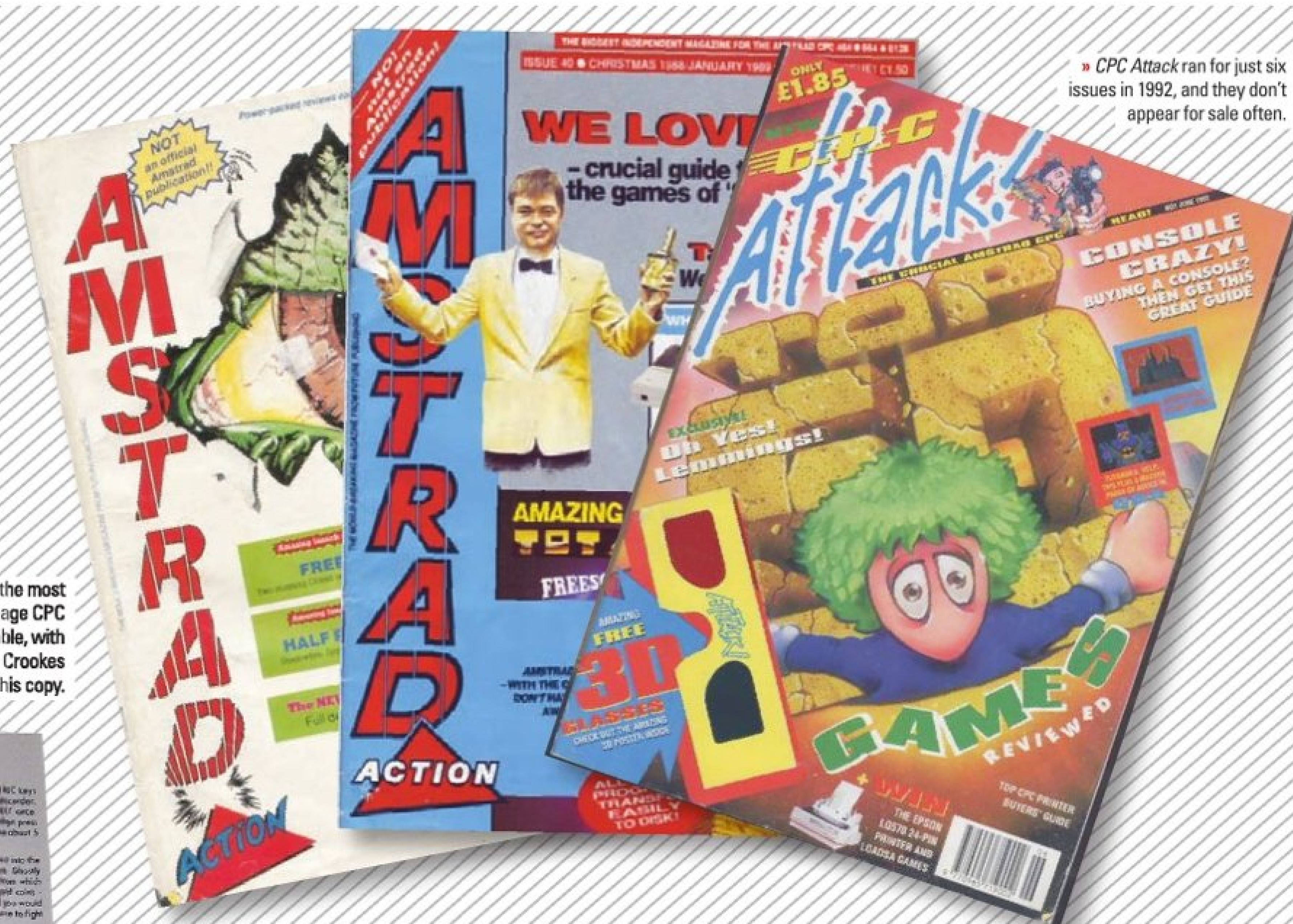
With such a large foothold, French developers naturally made the Amstrad their primary platform. Ubisoft's graphical adventure *Fer Et Flamme* (*Iron And Flame*) was exclusive to the CPC, and it was the French company's first major hit. Developers in France produced some of the Amstrad's most popular and critically acclaimed games, among them Titus's *Crazy Cars* and Loriciels' *Skweek*, the latter having not been released on any other 8-bit machine.

The French CPC releases leaned very heavily towards adventure and arcade titles, including *Captain Blood*, *Defender Of The Crown*, *Iron Lord* and *B.A.T.*, which makes it an attractive proposition for fans of these genres. And since French developers were producing primarily for the CPC, they pushed the technology in ways that many of their British counterparts did not, and so techniques such as overscan and a devotion to the production of superlative graphics were high on the agenda.

Why does this make the CPC ripe for collectors? Simply because there is a treasure trove of import releases to collect. The French philosophy was to produce outstanding-looking games with a unique Gallic edge to them. In truth, it was less a philosophy and more to do with market forces, given that the

DID YOU KNOW?

■ In Germany, the CPC was distributed by Schneider, without the coloured keys. The company put its name on the 464, 664 and 6128, and while almost all of the keys on each machine were grey, light brown keys replaced the colourful ones of the original. That wasn't the only difference: Schneider placed its logo on the computers, and the start screen also displayed Schneider. It was only later, when Amstrad distributed the machines itself, that they were branded with the original logo. The 6128 in Germany had ribbon cable connectors rather than printed circuit board edge connectors.

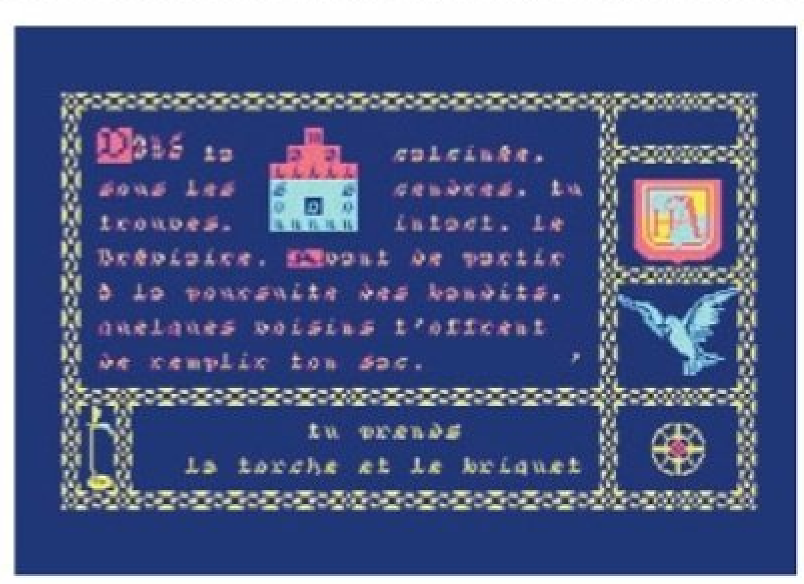


» *Amstrad Action* was the most popular English-language CPC magazine. Issue 1 is valuable, with Retro Gamer's David Crookes spending £50 on his copy.

» *CPC Attack* ran for just six issues in 1992, and they don't appear for sale often.









French market was a demanding one. But this means there are games out there that many will not have played and that, with the help of online translation services such as Google Translate, can be thoroughly enjoyed by monoglots.

Spain was the next-largest market in mainland Europe, where it was distributed by Indescorp as the CPC 472, the extra 8K of RAM being unusable but a good wheeze by Amstrad to get around a Spanish tax on computers with 64K or less RAM that lacked Spanish-language keyboards.

Tapes were more common in these countries, which, as in the UK, ensured that there were thriving budget scenes. The downside to the French taste for disks meant cheap thrills were far less common, not that it appeared to damage the machine's sales. Collectors who decide to go for a disk-based machine, however, can rest assured that it is possible to hook up a cassette recorder using an inexpensive lead and, fiddly volume controls aside, play tape-based games without a problem.

Collectors will also enjoy checking out the games that took advantage of the 128K of memory of the 6128 and could be accessed by inserted a 64K RAM pack into the back of a 464. Games included Gremlin's *Nigel Mansell's World Championship*, *Space Crusade*, *Supercars*, *Hero Quest* and *Switchblade*. Level 9 produced *Gnome Ranger*, *Ingrid's Back!*, *Knight Orc*, *Lancelot* and *Scapeghost*, all with pictures on the 128K versions. *The Famous Five*, *The Pawn*, *The Guild Of Thieves*, *Jinxter* and *Corruption* were only playable if 128K was available. Tape titles such as *Spellbound Dizzy* provided extra graphical effects on a 6128, such as animated Yolkfolk. *Gryzor*, *Renegade*, *Operation Thunderbolt* and *Bad Dudes vs Dragon Ninja* allowed levels to load in one go. For gamers, an extra 64K was a major bonus.

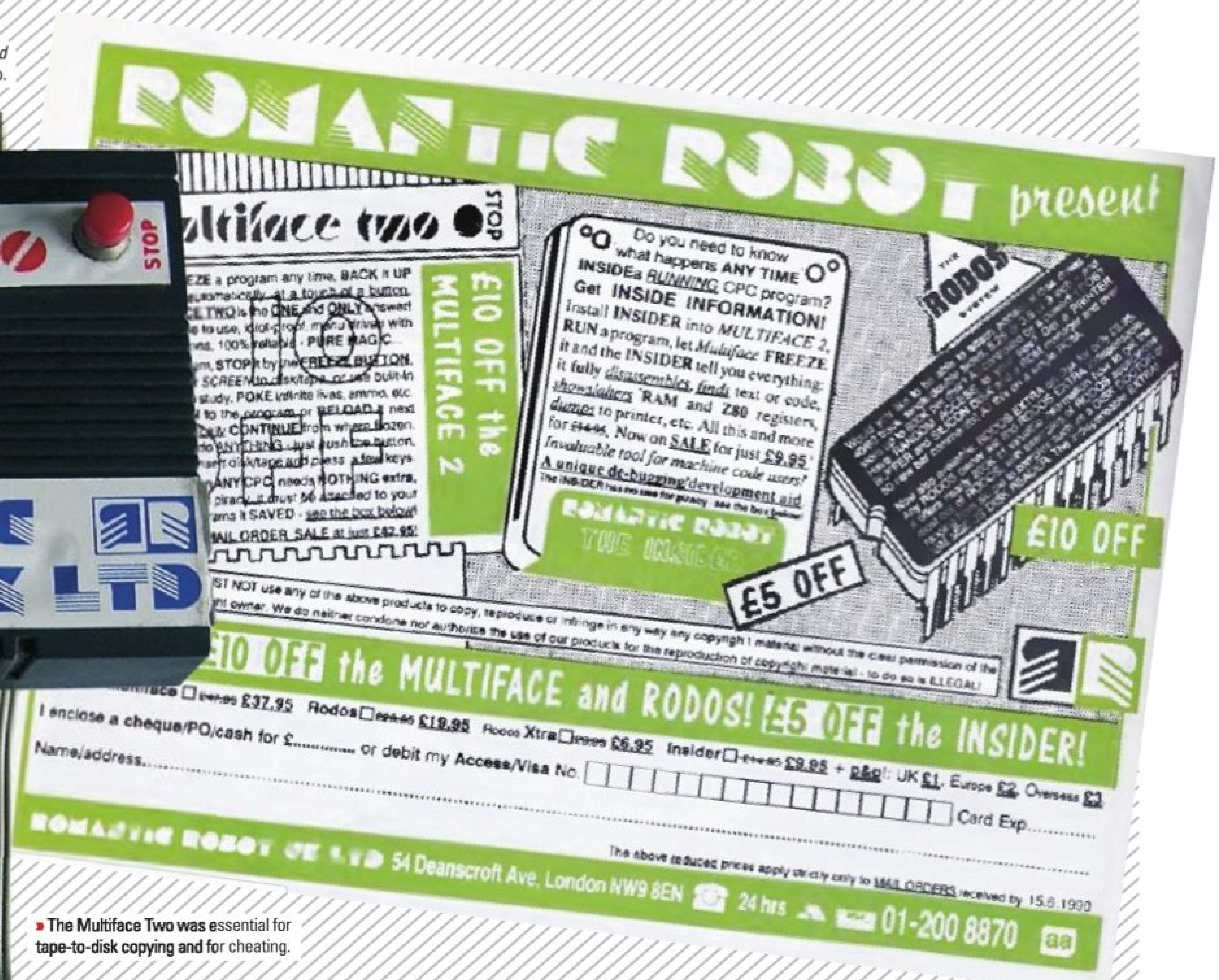
In all territories, the new Amstrad 8-bit computers, which replaced the CPC in 1990, flopped terribly, despite their 4,096 colours and cartridge facilities. They consisted of the GX4000 console, 464 Plus and 6128 Plus, and while Amstrad said it wasn't possible for disk and tape-based games to take advantage of the extra spec, such limitations were broken by a hack, leading to the likes of *Stryker In The Crypts Of Trogan*, *Prehistorik 2* and Ocean's *Space Gun* using the hardware, and each one is worth checking out.

The commercial failure of the GX4000 and Plus models hasn't lessened their worth to collectors. A GX4000 is a worthwhile purchase, if only to try to track down some incredibly rare offerings like *Chase HQ II*, *Copter 271* and even *Pang*, which is seen as one of the better games and so is closely held on to by collectors. You could be looking at anything in the region of £50 for a GX4000 console on eBay.

Finally, as the CPC entered its last days, many amazing games were released, including the PD title *Croco Magneto* and semi-commercial titles such as *Fluff*, *Megablasters* and *Masters Of Space*, which you may struggle to find on their original disks. More recently, French coders Julien 'Targhan' Nevo and Supersly released the amazing point-and-click adventure *Orion Prime*. The goodies keep coming…

Special thanks to Jaime González Soriano, Richard Goulstone, JMD, Kukulcan, Rafa and Xyphoe

THE PERIPHERALS



» An advertisement in *Amstrad Action* for the Multiface Two.



» The Multiface Two was essential for tape-to-disk copying and for cheating.

MULTIFACE TWO

If you are looking to play original games on an original Amstrad CPC, the key peripheral is the Multiface Two. It was such a versatile piece of kit that used to weigh in at £47.95. Its manufacturer, Romantic Robot, typically reduced that amount by a tenner, and it would later suggest that it was a case of "Buy now or it's bye now". The nature of the peripheral – it boasted the ability to copy games as a side effect of its advertised uses – meant it was treading around in a very grey area.

The actual device was nothing amazing to look at and neither was its build quality particularly astounding. It was a small black box with two stickers slapped on the front and a couple of buttons – one blue, one red – with a through connector on one end, allowing users to attach more peripherals and a ribbon cable leading out of the other. But it's not about what it looked like. It's about what it did, and it continues to be so useful for collectors today that you'll be hard pressed to track one down for a low price. They tend to go for around £30 when sold today.

The Multiface Two was developed by Alexander Goldscheider, and it was great for 6128 owners who had cassette decks plugged in to their disk-based machines. It meant they could tap into the mountain of tape games without having to suffer the hassle of waiting for them to load, time and time again. Once the initial load had been performed, a press of the red button froze the CPC and an exact copy of what was in the computer's memory at that time was taken. This could then be dumped to disk, and it was useful not only for making backups but for saving games midway at a time when most games didn't have a save facility. Magazines also printed Multiface cheats, which could be tapped in for infinite lives and the like. This provided a reason to buy for those gamers who did not have disk machines.

Of course, there was software available that attempted to copy games to disk without extra hardware, but this ate into the memory and it was never as successful in copying nor as versatile as this device. The key argument put forward by Romantic Robot against accusations of piracy was that to play your games back on disk, you needed to have the Multiface Two plugged in. That was the theory, anyway, because there was software available in the public domain to get around that restriction and turn copies into standalone programs.

In later hardware revisions, there was a basic memory editor, which was handy for computer programmers, and it was even clever enough to avoid detection. The Multiface Two would always be turned off until the red button was pressed, getting around any games with the ability to detect the peripheral, often leading to the CPC crashing.

The Multiface Two was a revelation and an absolute must for any serious gamer, and today you can use it to make backups of your collection and to speed up loading times of any tapes you have. Oh, and finish those large and difficult games that you couldn't manage in one sitting the first time around.

...AND THE REST



01. Disk drive

■ The DD1-1 3-inch disk drive and interface for the 464 allowed gamers to play disk-based titles. An FD-1 second drive for the 464, 664 and 6128 was also available, shipping without the interface. In later years, many CPCers would hook up 3.5-inch drives to take advantage of cheaper, higher-capacity disks.

02. dk'tronics 64K Memory Expansion

■ Any 464 and 664 gamer wanting to get the best out of a selection of games including *No Exit*, *Pirates!* and *Chase HQ* needed to expand the memory. This expansion pack, styled to match the original machines, was inserted into the back of the CPC. Expect to pay £60 today.

03. GX4000

■ Although not strictly a peripheral, buying this flop console was a way to take advantage of a new wave of Amstrad games. A cartridge slot was built in to the Plus machines, and a hack enabled tape and disk games to take advantage of the 4,096 colours, hardwire sprites and scrolling offered by cartridge games.

04. Joystick

■ Official Amstrad joysticks were produced and boxed under the subsidiary brand Amsoft. They were rather flimsy affairs and barely lasted a wiggle of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. A joystick was bundled with the machine as part of a games pack that included *Monopoly*, *Trivial Pursuit* and *Roland* games. The pack was apparently "worth £150".

05. MP-1 modulator

■ Anyone unlucky enough to have a green-screen monitor bundled with their CPC soon realised the negative impact it had when playing games. Using an MP-1 modulator on a 464, you could hook your CPC up to a colour television. An MP-2 modulator, with an additional 12V power supply, was made for the 664 and 6128.

06. RS232 serial interface

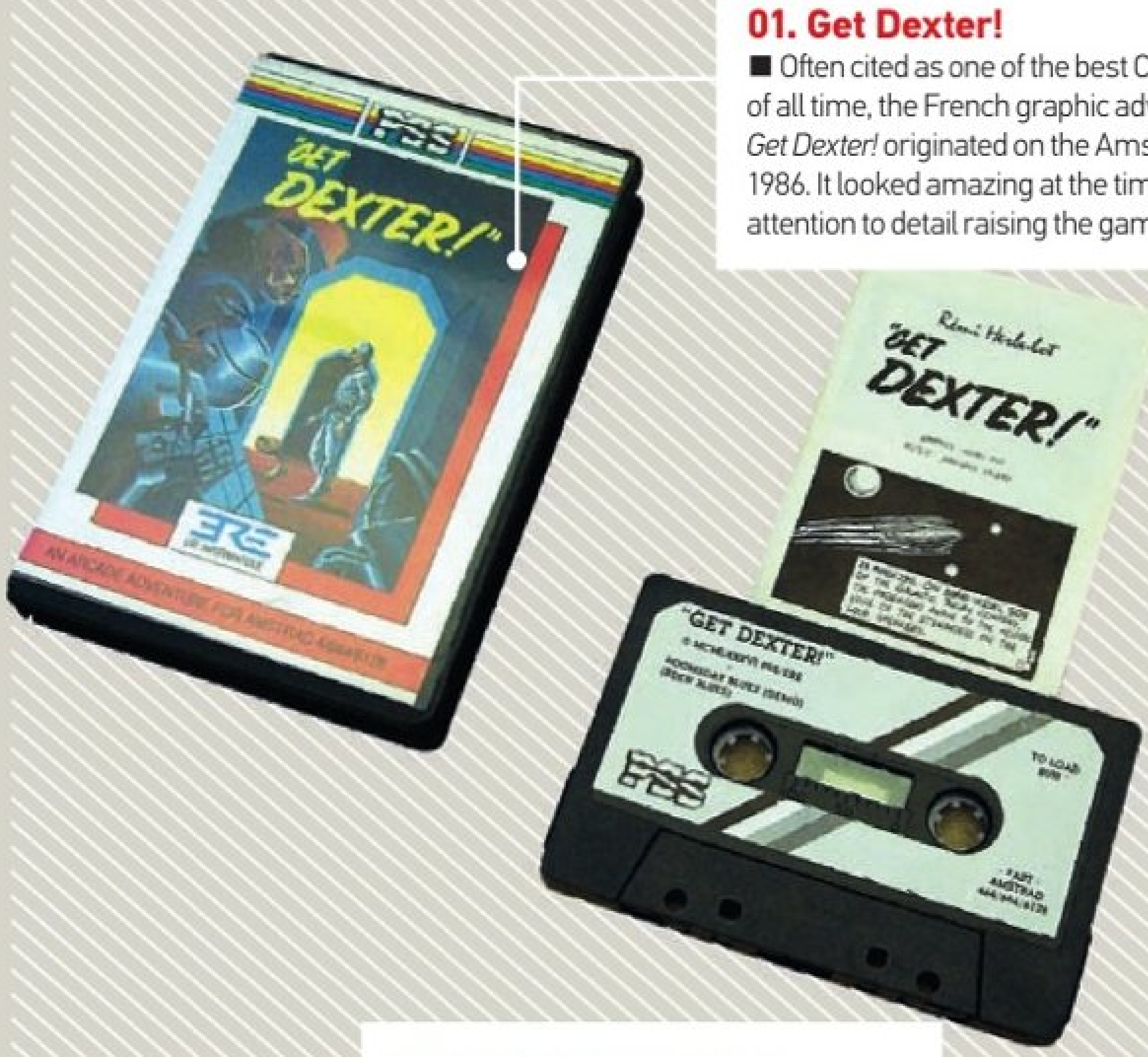
■ Useless today but very much useful back in the day, having an RS232 serial interface meant CPC users could hook up to online bulletin boards, where they could swap tips and share information. Adventure game fans appeared to enjoy them, giving access to downloadable public domain games and solutions. Today, it has novelty value.

07. Tape connector leads

■ Although 664 and 6128 users were blessed with fast disk drives, they would glance enviously at the plethora of cheaper cassette games and *Amstrad Action* cover tapes. All you needed to solve this conundrum was an inexpensive set of leads and a cassette recorder. It was not possible to connect a tape recorder to a 6128 Plus, though.

CPC The Collector's Guide

TOP FIVE GAMES TO PLAY



01. Get Dexter!

■ Often cited as one of the best CPC games of all time, the French graphic adventure *Get Dexter!* originated on the Amstrad in 1986. It looked amazing at the time, its attention to detail raising the gaming bar.



02. Turrican

■ Although originally released on the Commodore 64, this graphically arresting and utterly huge game was a fantastic CPC shoot-'em-up.

03. Rick Dangerous 2

■ As what is arguably the precursor to *Tomb Raider*, *Rick Dangerous 2*, despite its blocky yet colourful graphics, achieved a staggering 97% in *Amstrad Action*.



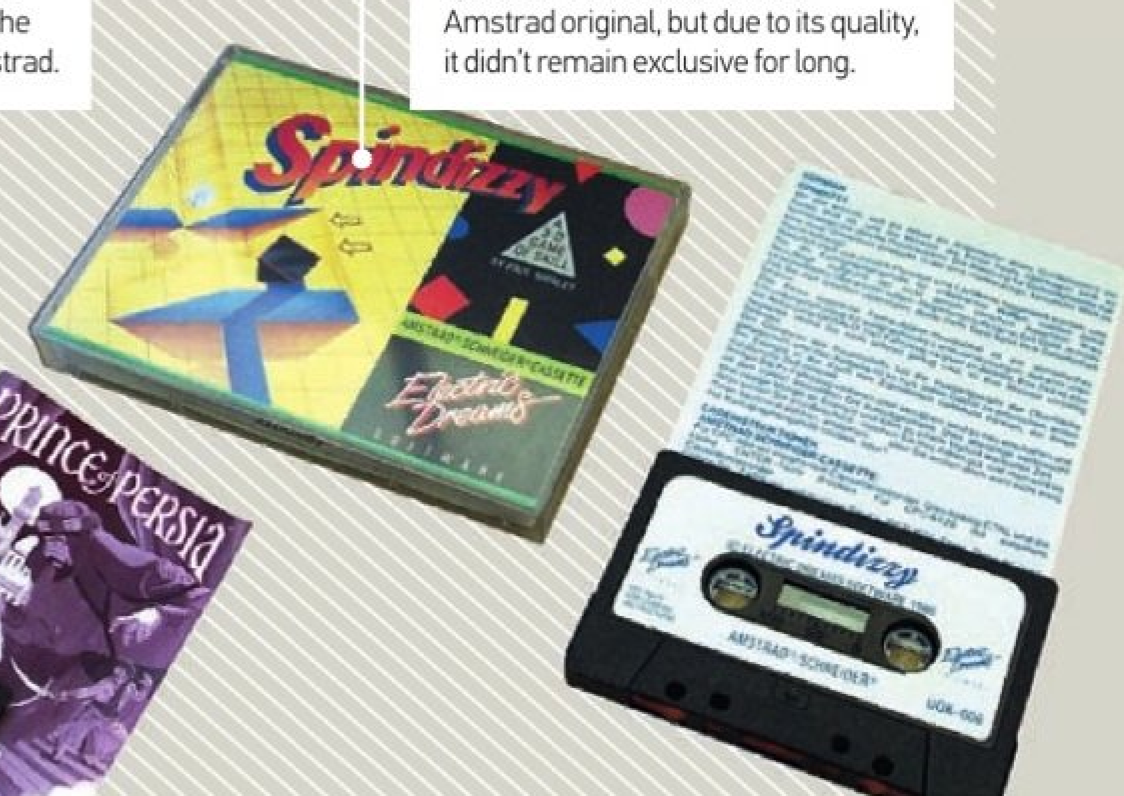
04. Prince Of Persia

■ Jordan Mechner's masterpiece showed that the CPC could hold its own against 16-bit opposition and was heralded as an example of the graphical capabilities of the Amstrad.



05. Spindizzy

■ Anyone who remembered *Marble Madness* took to the huge 400-screen *Spindizzy* with ease. It was an Amstrad original, but due to its quality, it didn't remain exclusive for long.



PLAY THESE NEXT



Knight Lore

■ The CPC version was better than that of the Spectrum, of that there was no doubt. It was the first Ultimate game to arrive on the Amstrad, with *Sabre Wulf* hot on its heels, and it certainly didn't disappoint. It boasted delicious packaging and a tape bulging with incredible, colourful 3D goodness.



Ranarama

■ A *Gauntlet* clone it may have been but a debut Amstrad title it was too. And a good one at that. It was a polished shoot-'em-up with spells that made it a spot of magic for any CPC gamer. Produced by Steve Turner (interviewed on page 84 of this very issue), it was a sterling and surprisingly original effort.



The Sentinel

■ With 10,000 levels, *The Sentinel* was one huge game. Created by Geoff Crammond for the BBC, this was no less a game for being a port. It reviewed incredibly well and has been acclaimed as one of the best titles of all time, regardless of platform. For that reason it has to be here and must be experienced.



Prehistorik 2

■ As a classic by *Zap't'Balls* creator Elmar Krieger and ported to numerous other machines, *Prehistorik 2* made extra use of the 6128's capacity, not least with the addition of in-game music. Although it was available for 64K machines, it surpassed itself with the 6128 Plus, using additional parallax scrolling graphics.



Sorcery+

■ When you picked up Amstrad literature around 1985, chances are you would see *Sorcery+* looking back at you. Its superlative graphics were used to show off what was being touted as the CPC's killer game, and it was no idle boast, with this disk-based version expanding the original's 40 screens to 75.

TOP FIVE IMPORT GAMES



01. Iron Lord

Coming on two disks and taking up both sides of each, this was one big game. But even though it received 92% in *Amstrad Action*, Ubisoft decided not to release it in the UK.

02. Prohibition

■ Restricted in Germany, *Prohibition* was a shoot-'em-up with Gallic flair, and it was soon released in English. Be aware that the 128K version doesn't work on Plus machines.

03. Orphée: Le Voyage Aux Enfers

■ The first French graphical adventure, *Orphée* impressed with its colourful graphics and myriad locations. It's not the easiest of games, but it is quite addictive.

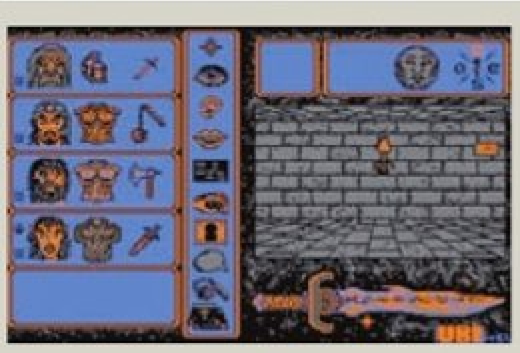
04. Mandragore

■ This was a popular game in France and one of the first RPGs. Originally produced for the Thomson M05, it was ported to the Amstrad CPC and later given English translations, but it didn't grab the attention in the same way as across the Channel.

05. Sapiens

■ Never released outside France, it's well worth getting your hands on *Sapiens*. It was the CPC's debut open adventure game, set in a prehistoric land in a battle for survival. It could be viewed side-on and in 3D isometric.

IMPORT THESE NEXT



Le Maitre Des Âmes

■ The French sure did love their role-playing games, and this fantasy adventure ticks all of the boxes and really should have been given an English-language release. With the usual wizards, dwarves and elves, there wasn't much of a departure from what you'd expect of an RPG, but it sure was fun.



Fugitif: Les Aventures De Jack Bludfield – Part 1

■ A technically impressive release, players used the cursor keys to get around *Fugitif*'s gaming world and utilised an icon-based system to input commands. It was produced in the CPC's high-res four-colour mode, but the programmers used clever tricks to extend the palette beyond that limit.



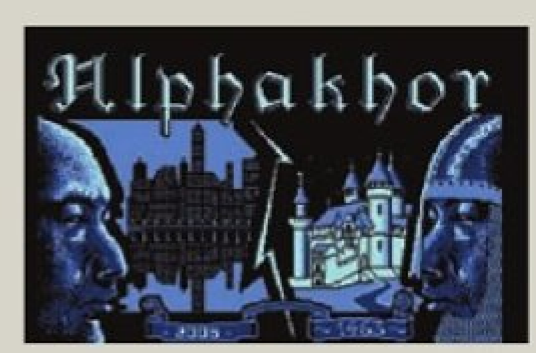
La Malédiction

■ Although suffering somewhat in the gameplay department, it is worth getting hold of in order to see the typical Eighties French touch on many of the games produced at around that time. Often they had good ideas and nice graphics, yet were let down by glaring omissions for a text adventure, such as not giving decent descriptions.



Les Passagers Du Vent

■ Although the sequel, *Passengers On The Wind 2*, was translated into English and released in the UK, the debut game was not. It's not a particularly long game, but given that it is based on a cartoon strip, it looks amazing, with graphics that burst from the screen and with a great audio score driving you on.



Alphakhor

■ If you have a grasp of French, you won't want to miss this impeccably presented text adventure by Loriciel. It's not an easy game to track down but it's worth the perseverance, with a mature and intriguing plot about a deadly virus threatening mankind in 2006 that mirrors an outbreak from 1463.

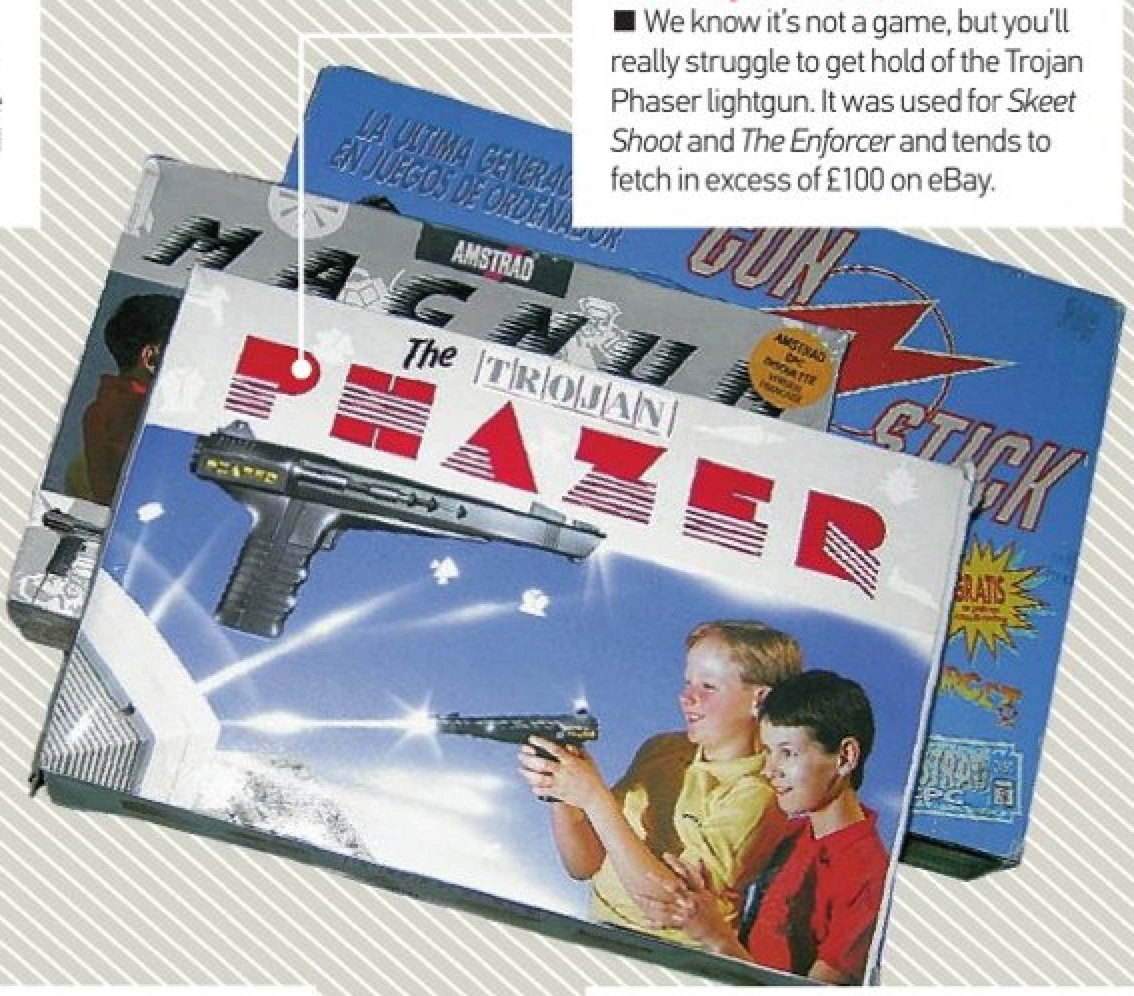
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TOP FIVE RAREST PAL GAMES



01. Pang (cartridge)

■ There is no doubt that *Pang* was one of the best cartridge releases, and it sold more than most other games for the Plus and GX4000. But because it is one of the more desirable games, most people keep hold of it, making it relatively hard to track down.



02. Trojan Phaser

■ We know it's not a game, but you'll really struggle to get hold of the Trojan Phaser lightgun. It was used for *Skeet Shoot* and *The Enforcer* and tends to fetch in excess of £100 on eBay.

03. Copter 271 (cartridge)

■ You will find that most of the rare games were launched for the ill-fated Plus and GX4000 mainly because, by this time, most people were moving on. *Copter 271* was, like *Chase HQ*, a late release and fetches a pretty penny on eBay.



04. Haunted Hedges

■ It's not just *Haunted Hedges* that can prove difficult to get hold of but most of the big box Amsoft releases. Find a sealed copy – the holy grail in some respects – and you won't actually have to pay too much.



05. Chase HQ II (cartridge)

■ For a long time, collectors were not sure if *Chase HQ II* even existed on cartridge, but then one was unearthed by James Bridges. It would have been released at the end of the GX4000's life.



GET THESE NEXT



Qin

■ The last time we saw a copy of *Qin* on eBay, it fetched in excess of £100. It's as hard to find information about it as it is to track down the game itself, but sources in France tell us it's very high on the 'most wanted' list of titles for CPC fans to play, and this desirability must have contributed to its rarity.



Fluff

■ *Fluff* was one of the last commercial releases for the Amstrad CPC, produced by one-man team Radical Software. Although the initial games were sold in white cases, artistic boxes were used later, taking the image of the Fluff character that adorned the cover of *Amstrad Action*. The game barely sold, so finding these will be hard.



Megablasters

■ Published by Radical Software in the UK, *Bomberman* clone *Megablasters* also came in a box and was one of the final commercial games for the CPC. Like *Fluff*, it sold little despite being an amazing game and topping some people's must-play lists. It's worth scouring round on the off-chance you can find it.



The Great Giana Sisters

■ This game was on sale for just a couple of weeks before Nintendo felt it was far too similar to *Super Mario Bros* and so took out a successful lawsuit against Rainbow Arts. So few would have had the chance to snap up the game, and yet it's worth playing. Ironically, in 2009 it finally found a release… on Nintendo's own DS.

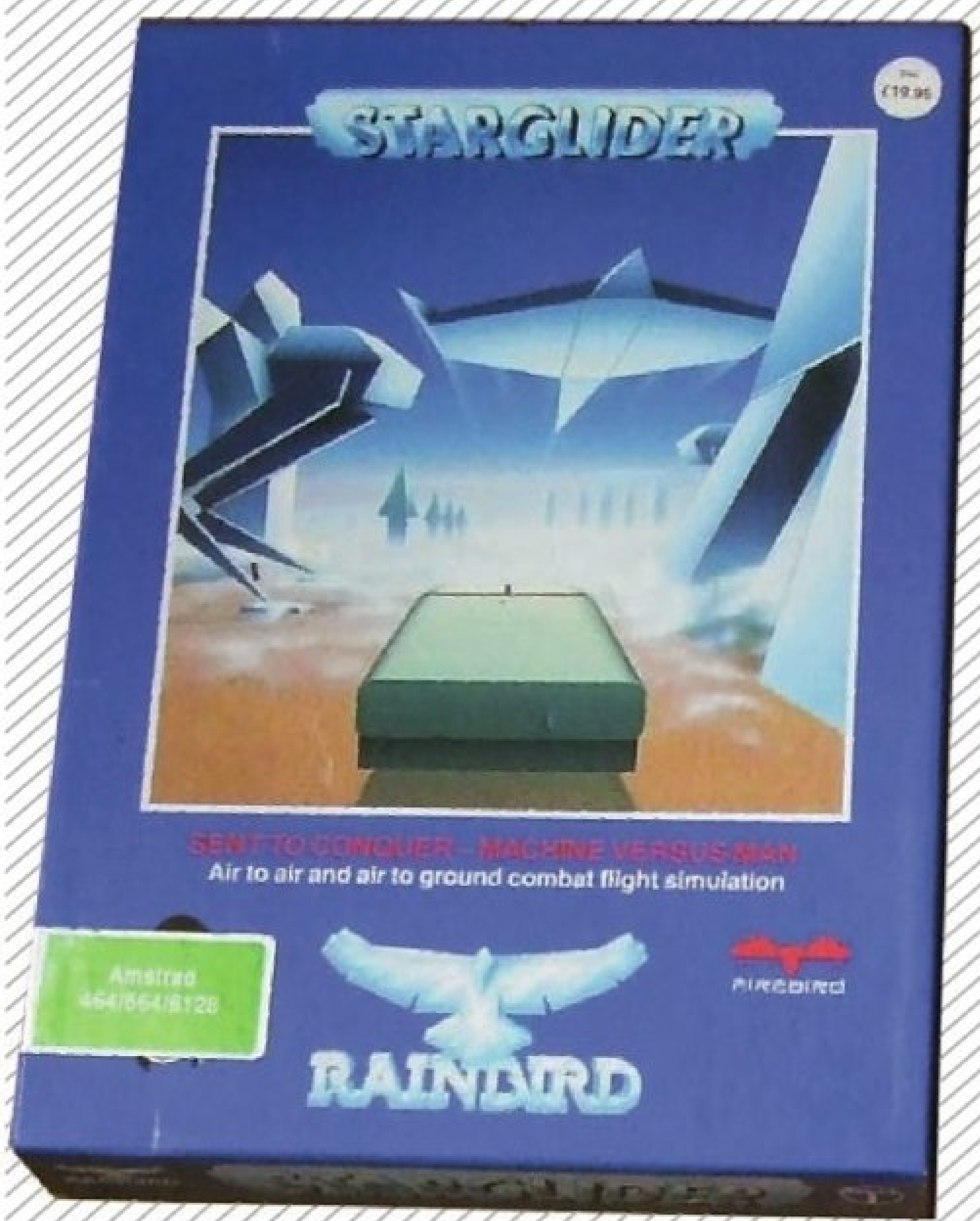


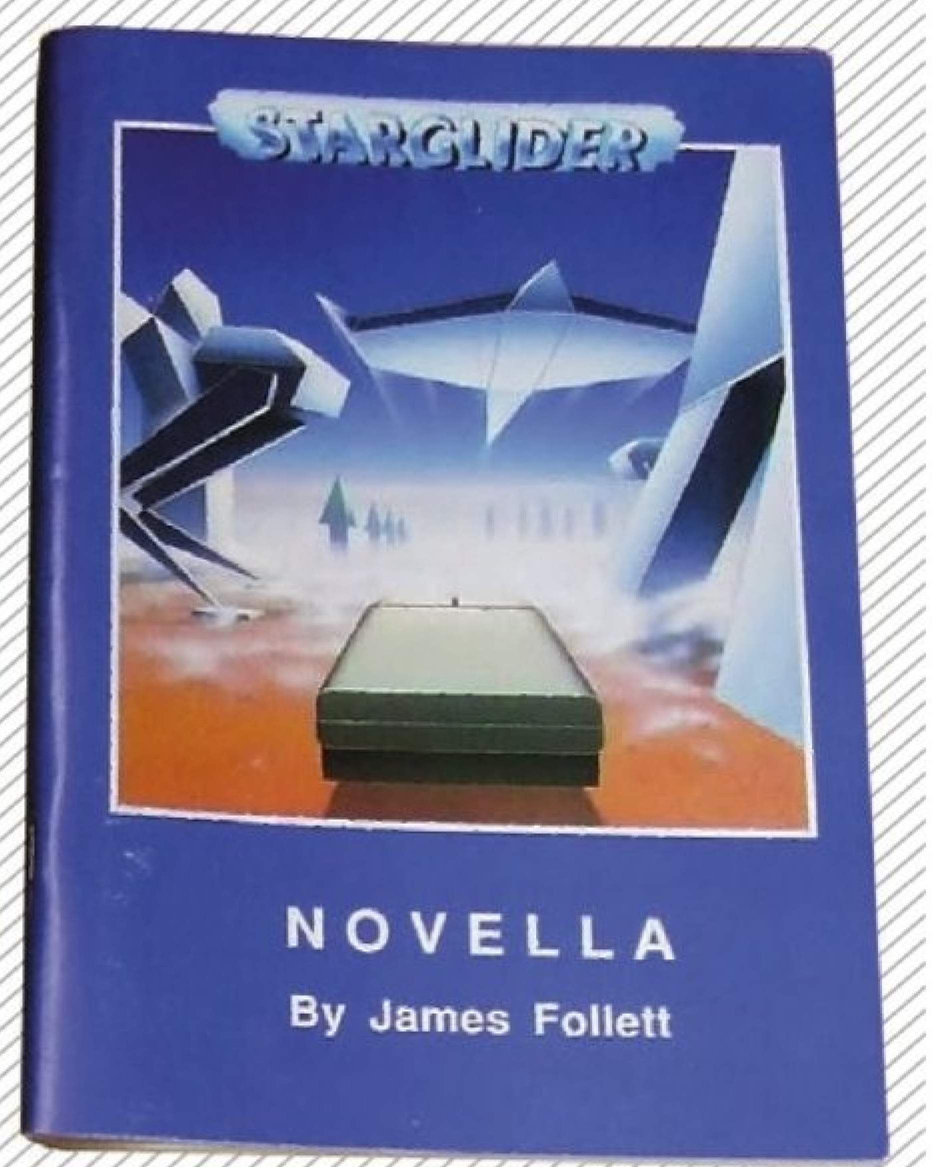
Street Fighter II

■ Okay, a red herring. This game was promoted month after month in *Amstrad Action*. It was promised that the game was at an advanced stage and would be due soon. But it never actually appeared on the shelves. Or did it? Anyone who manages to track down the source code would be a hero to the CPC community.

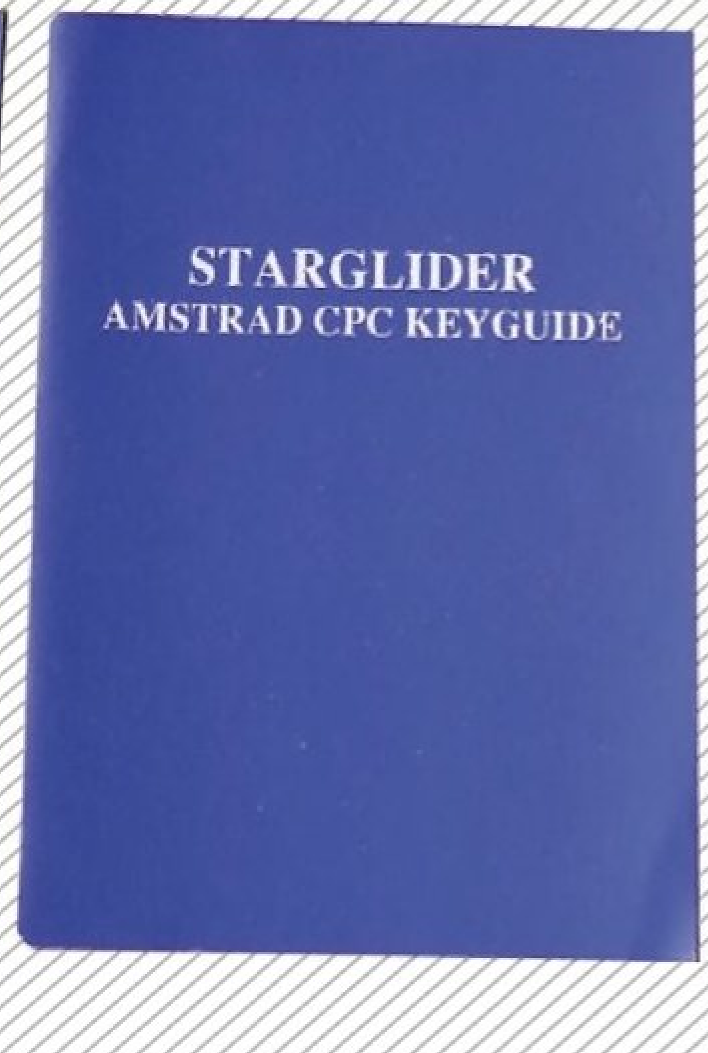
THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

It's one of the best CPC games of all time, but what marks it out is the packaging – a complex title complete with playguide, keyguide and a novella…















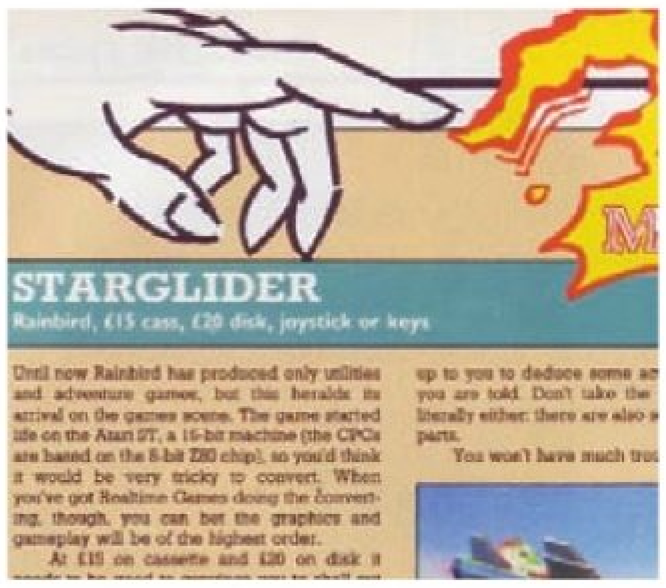
The Game

■ This was Rainbird's first arcade-style game, and it had its work cut out from the start. It was ported from the Atari ST and suffered little in the process. Firebird actually bundled this with *The Sentinel*, *Elite*, *Ace 2* and *Tetris* further down the line.



The Packaging

■ As if to justify the expense, the game came bundled with some useful paper. The playguide was accompanied by a novella written by popular UK author and screenwriter James Follett as well as a guide to the keys. Very much in the *Elite* mould.



The Cost

■ *Starglider* was not cheap. It came in at £15 on tape and £20 on disk and subsequently didn't go on to sell a great deal, relatively speaking. But for a game that earned an *Amstrad Action* Mastergame award with 91%, many felt it was worth every penny.

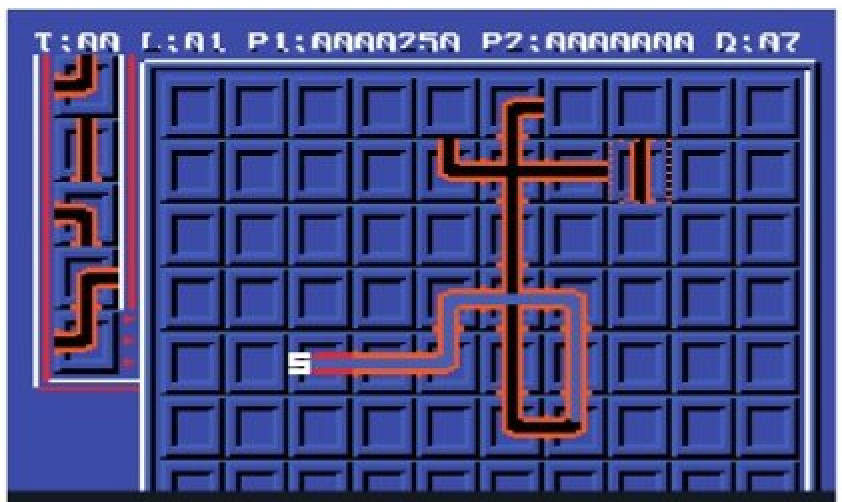
CPC The Collector's Guide

THE AMSTRAD CPC GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

- 3D Construction Kit
- Abadia Del Crimen, La
- Academy
- Addams Family, The
- Afterburner
- Alien8
- Alphakor
- Arkanoid
- Arkanoid II: Revenge Of Doh
- ATV Simulator
- Auf Wiedersehen Monty
- Autocrash
- Badlands
- Ball Bearing
- Barbarian
- Bard's Tale, The
- B.A.T.
- Batman
- Batman: The Movie
- Beach Head
- Bloodwych
- Blues Brothers, The
- Bomb Jack
- Bomb Room, The
- Boulder Dash
- Bubble Bobble
- Bumpy's Arcade Fantasy
- Burnin' Rubber
- California Games
- Captain Blood
- Castle Master
- Castle Master II: The Crypt
- Cauldron
- Chase HQ
- Chase HQ II (cart)
- Chevy Chase
- Chip's Challenge
- Chuckie Egg
- Colossal Adventure
- Combat School
- Continental Circus
- Copter 271 (cart)
- Crazy Cars II
- Crystal Kingdom Dizzy
- Cybernoid
- Cybernoid II
- Cyrus II Chess



Dizzy


Pipe Mania

- D-Day
- Daley Thompson's Decathlon
- Dan Dare
- Dark Side
- Darkman
- Deliverance: Stormlord II
- Dizzy
- Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk
- Donkey Kong
- Doomdark's Revenge
- Doors Of Doom
- Double Dragon
- Dragon Breed
- Dragontorc
- Driller
- Dun Darach
- E-Motion
- Eliminator
- Elite
- Emlyn Hughes International Soccer
- Everyone's A Wally
- Exolon
- Exterminator
- F-16 Combat Pilot
- Fantasy World Dizzy
- Final Fight
- Flimbo's Quest
- Fluff
- Football Manager
- Frankie Goes To Hollywood
- Fruit Machine Simulator
- Fugitif: Les Aventures De Jack Bludfield – Part 1
- Gauntlet
- Gauntlet II
- Gauntlet III: The Final Quest
- Gazza II
- Geste D'Artillac, La
- Get Dexter!
- Get Dexter 2
- Ghost Hunters
- Ghostbusters II
- Ghosts 'N Goblins
- Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- Grand Prix Simulator
- Great Giana Sisters, The
- Gremlins: The Adventure
- Gryzor
- Guild Of Thieves
- Gunship
- Hacker
- Hard Drivin'
- Harrier Attack
- Haunted Hedges
- Head Over Heels
- Heartland
- Heavy On The Magick
- Hero Quest
- Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy, The
- Hollywood Hijinx
- Hong Kong Phooey
- How To Be A Complete Bastard
- Hudson Hawk
- Hunchback
- Ikari Warriors
- Impossaball
- Impossamole
- Impossible Mission



Renegade

- Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade
- Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom
- Infernal House
- Insector Hecti At The Interchange
- International 3D Tennis
- International Karate
- International Karate +
- Iron Lord
- Italy 1990
- Jet Set Willy
- Karateka
- Klax
- Knight Lore
- Knight Tyme
- Koronis Rift
- Kwik Snax
- Laser Squad
- Lemmings
- Little Computer People
- Little Puff In Dragonland
- Loopz
- Lords Of Midnight
- Lost Caves And The Tomb Of Doom
- Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge
- Lurking Horror, The
- Magicland Dizzy
- Maitre Des Âmes, Le
- Malédiction, La
- Mandragore

EXTREMELY RARE Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.

VERY RARE Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.

RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

UNCOMMON You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.

COMMON Always just a click away for the average collector.

VERY COMMON So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- Manic Miner
- Manoir De Morteville
- Marsport
- Match Day II
- Megablasters
- Mercenary
- Midnight Resistance
- Myth
- Navy SEALs
- Nebulus
- Netherworld
- Nigel Mansell's World Championship
- Night Shift
- North & South
- Operation Wolf
- Orphée: Voyage Aux Enfers
- Pang (cart)
- Paperboy
- Passagers Du Vent, Les
- Pawn, The
- Pipe Mania
- Pirates!
- Piso Zero
- Power Drift
- Prehistorik
- Prehistorik 2
- Prince Of Persia
- Pro Tennis Simulator
- Prohibition
- Purple Saturn Day
- Puzznic
- Pyjamarama
- Qabbalah
- Qin
- Rainbow Islands
- Ranarama
- Red Moon
- Renegade
- Return To Eden
- Revolution
- Rick Dangerous
- Rick Dangerous 2
- RoboCop
- RoboCop 2 (cart)
- Rock Star Ate My Hamster
- Roland In Space



Solomon's Key

- Roland In The Caves
- Roland In Time
- Roland On The Ropes
- Sabre Wulf
- Sacred Armour Of Antiriad
- Sapiens
- Savage
- Scapeghost
- Sentinel, The
- Seymour Goes To Hollywood
- Shadow Of The Beast
- Shufflepuck Cafe
- SimCity
- Smash TV
- Solomon's Key
- Sorcery
- Sorcery+
- Space Crusade
- Spindizzy
- Spy vs Spy
- Starfox
- Starglider
- Starion
- Stroper
- Stunt Car Racer
- Super Cauldron
- Super Off Road
- Super Robin Hood
- Supercars
- Sweevo's World
- Switchblade
- Target Renegade
- Tau Ceti
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles 2
- Thrust
- Titan
- Titus The Fox
- Tomahawk
- Total Eclipse
- Total Recall
- Trailblazer
- Trantor
- Turbo The Tortoise
- Turrican
- Turrican 2
- Untouchables, The
- Uridium
- Way Of The Exploding Fist
- WEC Le Mans
- Wild West Seymour
- Winter Games
- Wizball
- World Series Baseball
- Worm In Paradise, The
- Xor
- Xyphoes Fantasy
- Yie Ar Kung-Fu
- Zap't'Balls: The Advanced Edition
- Zoids
- Zork I: The Great Underground Empire

Collector Q&A

In addition to his insane knowledge of the system, Richard Goulstone has an impressive collection



What drew you to collecting for the CPC?
I bought a CPC 664 in 1986 as my first 'serious' computer, and have been hooked ever since. It was the Rowan Atkinson adverts on television that originally drew my attention to them. I have owned several over the years, mainly 6128s, up until about 1992 when I sold the last one I had and moved on to a PC. But modern computers are so boring, so once I had the chance to get an Amstrad again in the late Nineties, I jumped at it.

How long have you been collecting for now?
Since the advent of auction websites in New Zealand in 1999. I saw people selling CPC stuff really cheap and got enthusiastic all over again. I started off collecting all 8-bit computers and got a reasonable collection together. Then I realised that unless I won the lottery, I had better limit myself to one system, and it had to be Amstrad.

What does the Amstrad offer over other 8-bits?
The Amstrad CPC was the pinnacle of 8-bit computers. It had a great all-in-one design, and it came with a real operating system – CP/M. It was easy to use and program, and the manual was very good. All in all, it was the complete all-in-one package with one plug.

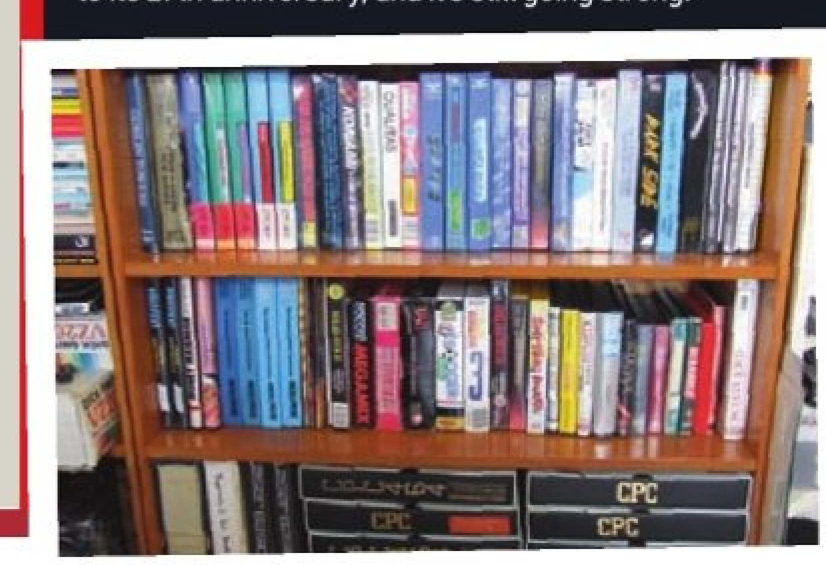
What do your family think of your collection?
Not much! My wife wonders why on earth I am interested in 'old' computers. But as it keeps me occupied in one room of the house she doesn't mind too much…

What's the most expensive game you own?
Probably an Amsoft disk game, like *Roland In Space*. I've seen some of the rarer ones sell on eBay for £20-30.

What's the rarest game in your collection?
I think one of my fully boxed and shrinkwrapped Amsoft titles. Usually, whenever anyone bought an Amsoft game back in the Eighties, the first thing they did was throw out the outer box and plastic insert.

What is the cornerstone of your collection?
Definitely my *Amstrad Computer User* collection. An almost complete collection, including issue 1. I must have read each issue ten times, as it captured the essence of the Amstrad CPCs of the time. People who were really interested in the machine wrote it.

What advice would you give to other collectors?
Join an online community and share what you have. I am currently uploading anything I have to CPC Wiki that isn't already there. Sites like that are a great way to archive everything and keep it current. The 464 is just coming up to its 27th anniversary, and it's still going strong.



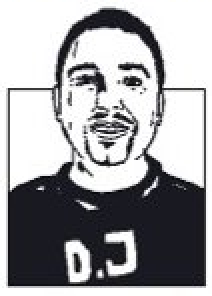

TIME
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The Firemen

IF YOU CAN'T STAND THE HEAT, TURN OFF YOUR SNES

» RETROREVIVAL



» SUPER NINTENDO
» HUMAN
» 1994

Considering the inherent danger and exhileration that come from fighting fires, it's rather surprising to discover that there aren't that many good videogames that are devoted to the subject.

By far the best is this rather delightful effort from Human Entertainment – the brains behind the *Clock Tower* and *Fire Pro Wrestling* franchises – that mixes soapy drama with epic level design and devious bosses to great effect.

Taking on the role of old-timer Pete, you must traverse a series of buildings, putting out fires, rescuing trapped survivors and generally acting like a bonafide hero. Pete is ably assisted by his young, nervous protégé Danny, and also receives solid back-up from the rest of the team, who'll point out weak structures in the six-level Metrotech Building and tell you where exits and areas of interest are located.

Pete and Danny must brave the flames, battle out-of-control robots and rescue as many people as possible if they're planning to get home to their loved ones for Christmas dinner. Fortunately, Danny is a dab-hand with his axe, while Pete boasts a magical hose that features a neverending supply of precious water. Water can be sprayed straight ahead, or directed downwards, and there's enough variety in the flames you encounter to give you the impression that you're battling a living, breathing entity.

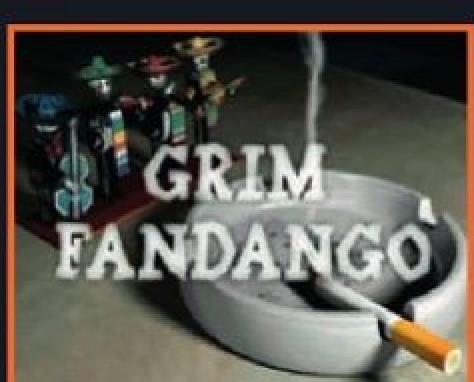
Considering its action credentials, there is a surprising amount of dialogue in *The Firemen*, but while it adds a nice dramatically campy touch to the proceedings – Danny is constantly whining and has to be reassured by the more experienced Pete, while civilians you find make over-dramatic points to emphasise their predicament – it isn't necessary to understand and enjoy the game.

This in itself is rather handy, for the PAL version is getting more expensive and harder and harder to find, especially if you're looking for a boxed copy. Strangely, *The Firemen* was never actually released in America, so most SNES owners will have to rely on the far cheaper, but no less enjoyable Super Famicom version for all their fire-battling thrills. *





GRIM FANDANGO



1998 was a landmark year in gaming. 3D acceleration was booming and the consoles of the time were serving up their most quintessential and timeless hits. As Tim Henderson discovers, this mark is secretly embedded on arguably the greatest adventure ever made…

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS
- » **RELEASED:** 1998
- » **PLATFORM:** WINDOWS
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Boot up a copy of *The Curse of Monkey Island* and, after not too much play, Guybrush will happen across the debut appearance of *Grim Fandango*'s player character, Manny Calavera. Passed out in a chicken shop, his face is expressionless in the way that only a papier-mâché skull can be. Alongside him sits a badge: 'Ask me about *Grim Fandango*'.

"We were making *Grim* at the same time that another team was working on *The Curse Of Monkey Island*," Tim Schafer, the game's now widely recognised creator, recalls. "One of the guys wanted to put the Manny in because it's not just a reference to *Grim*, but also to the first *Monkey Island* game where we had put an ad for *Loom* in the game."

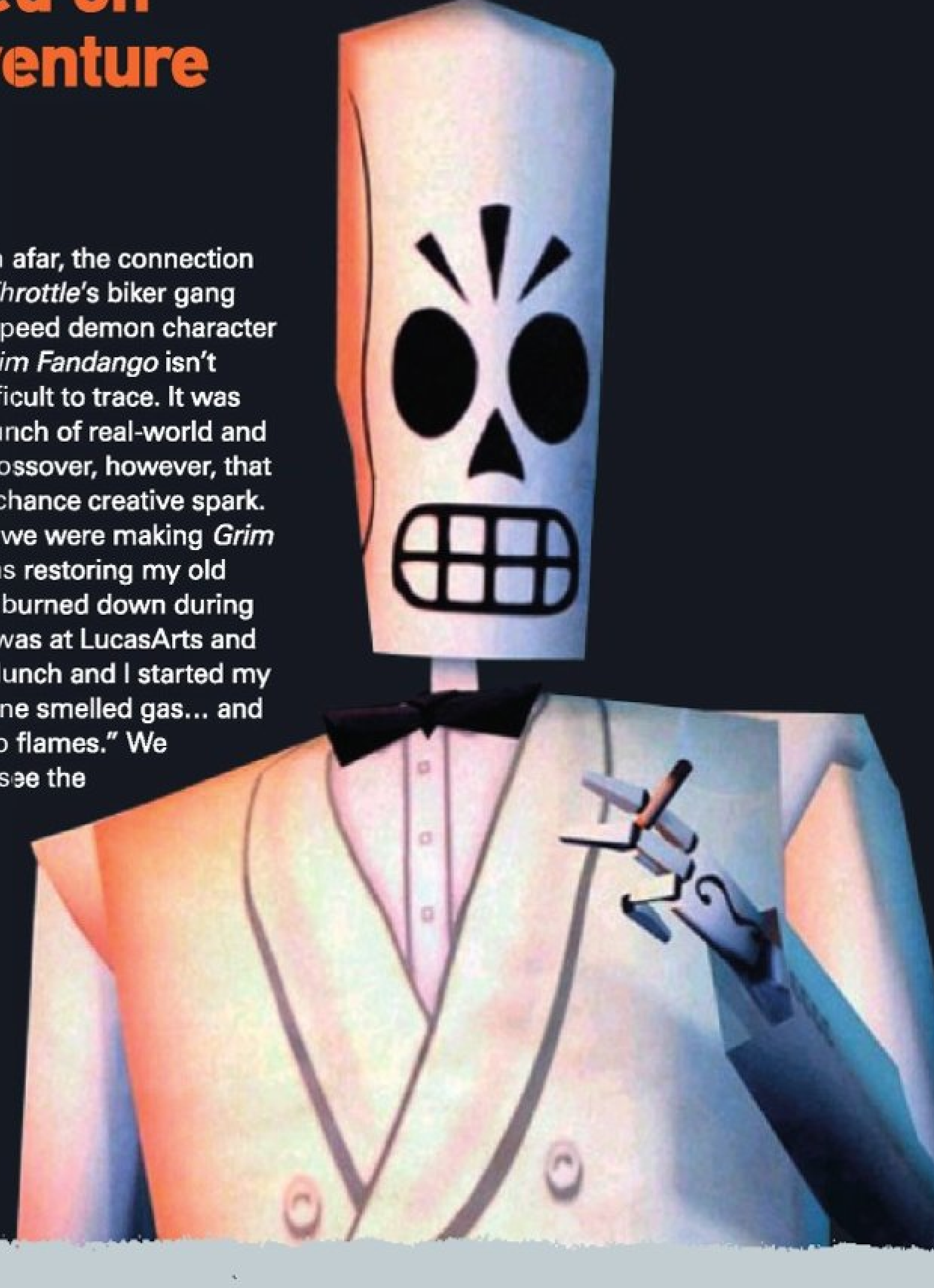
It turns out that the *Loom* ad found in the original *Monkey Island* was the doing of Schafer himself. However, as a connection between LucasArts' back catalogue and the creative processes that went into *Grim*, this cheeky slice of advertising is small fry. For one, Shafer is fortunate that his previous title, *Full Throttle*, made enough money for him to be able to afford a new car.

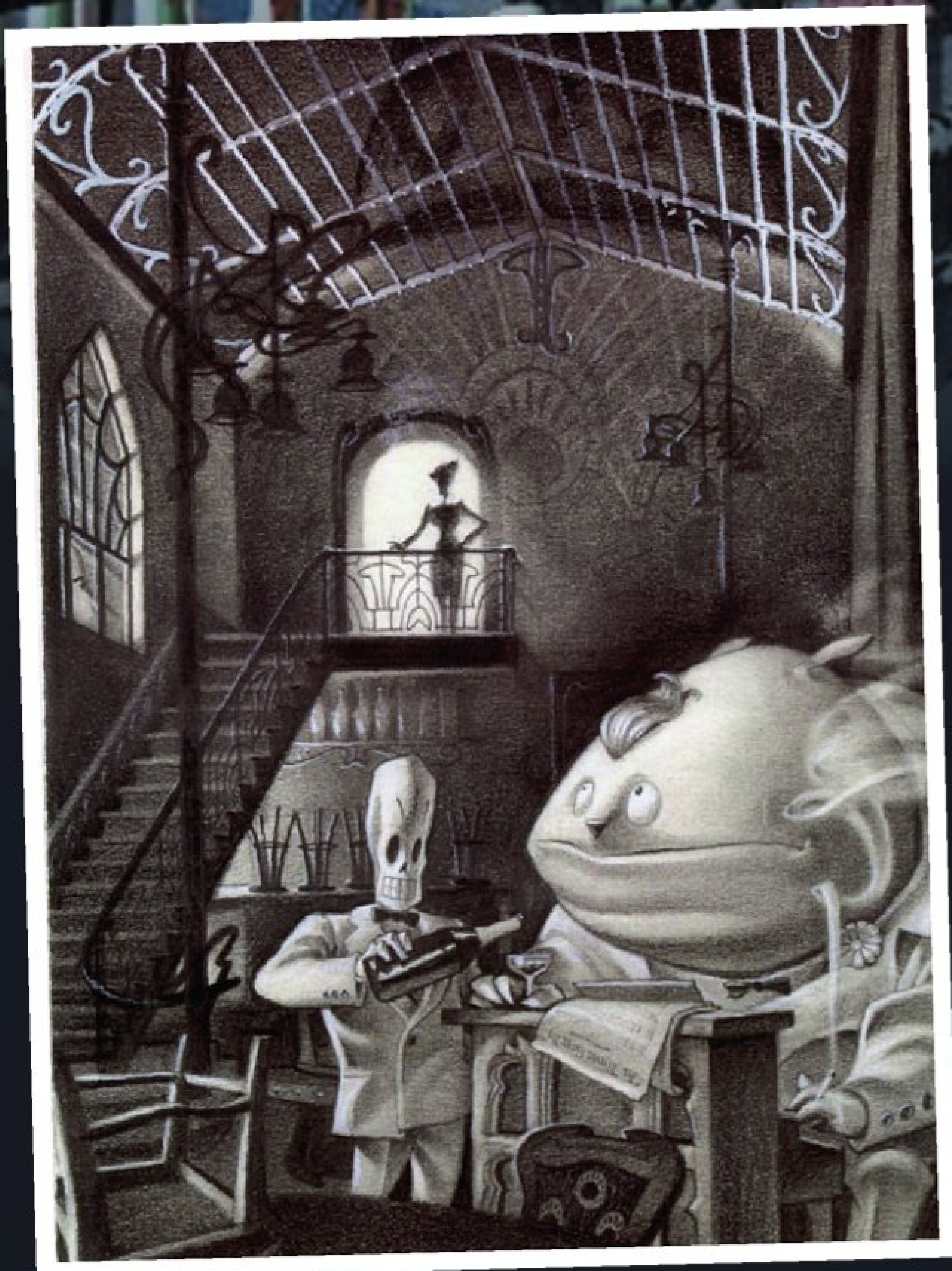
"*Full Throttle* sold a lot more than a lot of our graphic adventures had sold at that point. It was the first big hit graphic adventure that sold a million units, which was a lot for a PC graphic adventure back in 1995." This refresher catches us off-guard, undermining Shafer's often-romanticised underdog status. In fact, he puts *Grim Fandango*'s very existence down to "political clout" granted him by *Full Throttle*'s success. "I've definitely made less money than [Epic Games'] Cliffy B. But if I'd really been as bad as they say, I don't think I would still be allowed to make games; I think I would be gone," he reminds us.

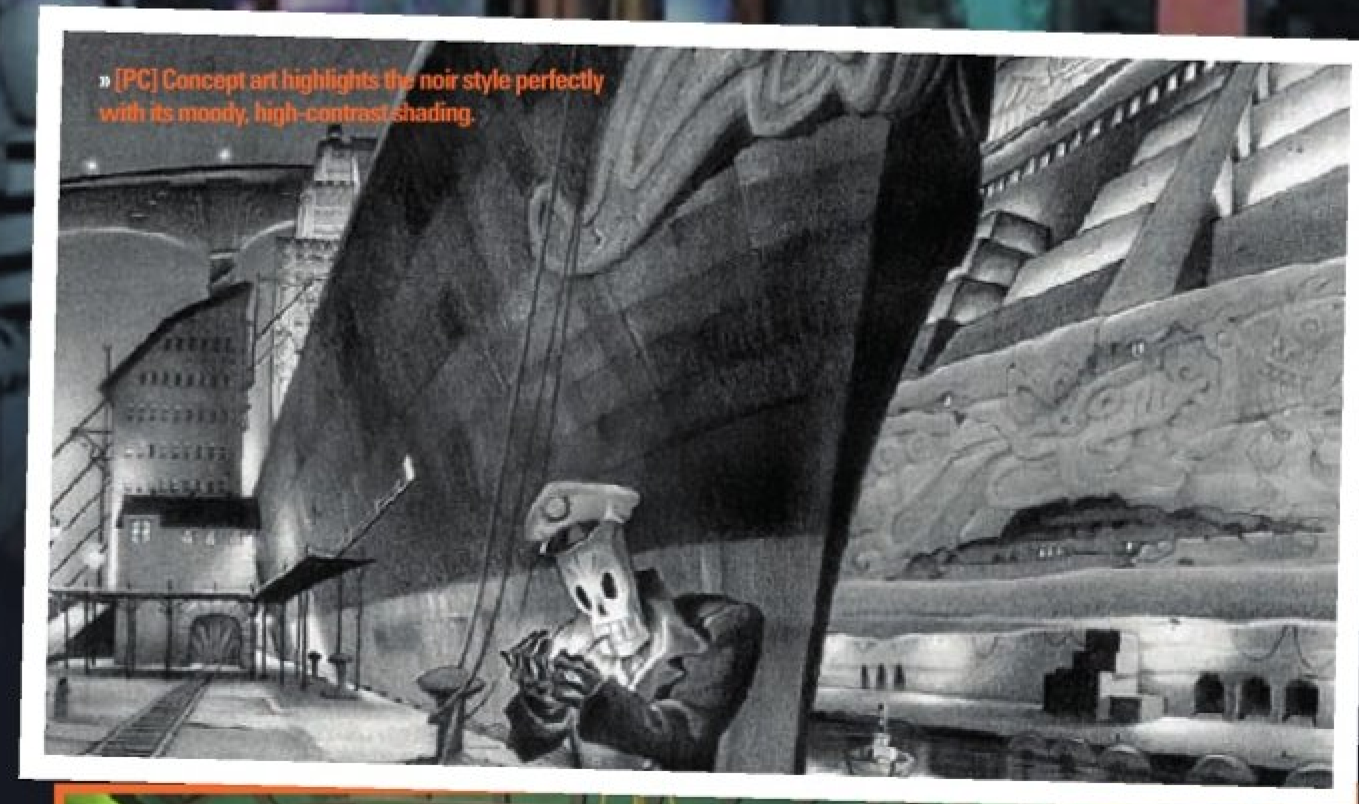
Viewed from afar, the connection between *Full Throttle*'s biker gang story and the speed demon character of Glottis in *Grim Fandango* isn't particularly difficult to trace. It was the one-two punch of real-world and game-world crossover, however, that really struck a chance creative spark.

"At the time we were making *Grim Fandango*, I was restoring my old car, which had burned down during *Full Throttle*. I was at LucasArts and we all went to lunch and I started my car and everyone smelled gas… and it just burst into flames." We can just about see the smile of wry amusement buried in the man's beard.

"I couldn't get anyone to fix my car," he continues, "and so







» [PC] Concept art highlights the noir style perfectly with its moody, high-contrast shading.



» [PC] Unlike many 3D efforts from the Nineties, *Grim* hasn't dated badly; in fact, its simple 'on the surafce' detail still looks great.

this old friend of mine, Paul – who I hadn't seen since I was in high school – called me up randomly and said: 'Hey, I saw your name on this game. Are you still making games? And what happened to your cool car?'"

Tim related his story of destructive woe to his mate, and the cogs that would grind out Glottis's dialogue – indeed, much of his overall personality – were set to motion.

"He decided to help me fix it up," Shafer continues. "So I spent my summer driving up to his house and tearing this car apart. I would be like, 'So, what's the next step on the car?' and he would just say stuff like, 'Well, we should just get some beer and sit there and stare at the car and talk about how cool it's gonna be.' He would say things that I'd write down and put into the game directly as Glottis's speech. He had this real innocent love of cars." Shafer breaks out into a spiel of his best Glottis-speak, ending on a meaty 'WHAH WHAH!' "I'd put it, line for line, in the game," he concludes.

The other side of Glottis's inspiration is recognisable on sight: the illustrative work of 'Big Daddy' Ed Roth. Much of it depicting what Schafer regularly refers to as "a pure love of driving", Roth's artistic work was clearly as substantial a dish as film noir on Schafer's plate of inspirational material.

Even today, just speaking of these images gets the man excited: "The back wheels are about ten times as big as the front wheels and there is smoke coming off every tyre and there are flames shooting out of the blower and the demon's tongue is hanging out and the tongue has warts on it and it's just like... it's just like this car-driving monster! I just looked at his face and these... these monsters just always have this joy of driving." The necessity of breathing interrupts his hyperactive speech. "Whatever you decide is cool when you're eight years old just sticks with you forever."

As memorable as he remains, Glottis is but a face amid *Grim*'s considerable cast, and influences on the game itself were equally widespread. "I guess I've always been the kind of person who takes in everything and then tries to chew it up and regurgitate it as a different form," Tim says. "If you do it right, it's not like you're stealing stuff. You're figuring out why that thing works, like, 'why did I love *Casablanca*?'"

Clearly, *Casablanca* was also on Schafer's list of inspirations. In fact, over the course of the game's planning and development, he somehow found time to take in an inordinate volume of film noir. "It was definitely a specific point in my

"I was worried that people would accuse us of selling out with Grim Fandango because it went 3D"

CARRYING THE INFLUENCE

IF THERE'S ONE thing that has remained consistent through much of Tim Schafer's work, it's a palpable love of vehicles with powerful engines under the hood. The appropriately named *Full Throttle* made this particularly obvious, and the rumble effect can be felt right through *Grim Fandango* and as far as *Brütal Legend*.

One of the seeds that would eventually sprout into Schafer's Heavy Metal adventure can be clearly seen in the developer diaries on Gamespot. To wit: his continued obsession with the original *Warcraft*.

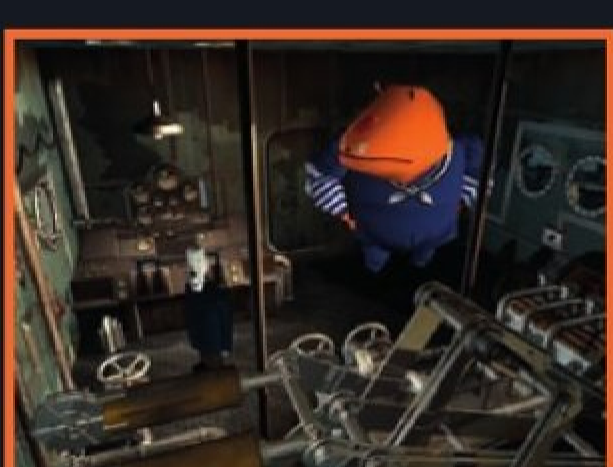
"That was the impetus for *Brütal Legend*. That... that thought, way back then, ever since the first time I played *Warcraft*, I was like, 'God, I love this kind of indirect control over minions and, you know, later I satisfied that urge by just starting a company. I always wanted to make one and I always imagined making this RTS with... at the time I was just thinking hot-rods."

CONSOLE CONTROLS ARE FUN

CONSIDERING THAT THEY'RE both under-loved products that have gone on to earn legendary status post-mortem (or maybe just because it made sense), we asked Schafer if he had ever intended to release *Grim Fandango* on the Dreamcast. What we got wasn't a direct answer, but was nonetheless an interesting and logical insight to how his own mind was working with regards to the games he played and the games he made at the time.

"*Grim*'s control scheme was heavily inspired by gamepad controls because that's when I, myself, made a transition to being a console game player. I was playing *Super Mario 64* and the first *Tomb Raider* game, and I was playing *Final Fantasy VII* – I just felt, this controller is so much more intuitive than point-and-click. Driving a character around with a stick is just so much more... natural."

He now freely admits that the resulting keyboard control felt less pleasurable than the gamepad experiences he had been influenced by. "I really wanted to emulate that console experience. The problem was that we emulated it for 'if you have a gamepad'. We really should have bundled with one," he says "Lucas did tonnes of OEM stuff back then."



life where I was into specific things. I think they show a lot in the game," he recalls. "I was really obsessed with film noir; I was reading a lot of Raymond Chandler; there happened to be a film festival at the Lark Theater in Marin showing a whole bunch of film noir movies. I went every single night and saw every single one."

The result of all this film consumption was a keen insight into what people commonly perceived film noir as, and what it actually could be. "People think that film noir has to be about a private dick – a private eye – like a Sam Spade," Schafer rolls his eyes. "But *Double Indemnity*, for example, is about an insurance salesmen who meets the wrong woman. So, I was like: 'Let's do that!'"

The insurance salesman in question would eventually grow into Manny Calavera. Drawing heavy inspiration from other films such as, notably, *Chinatown* and its plot of shady real estate business, the corruption eventually evolved into dealing with express tickets to the true afterlife – 'Who actually wants a plot of land in the Land of the Dead?' – and thus, in place of working in insurance, Manny was cast as a travel agent, doomed, as it were, by a considerable amount of spoon-fed bad luck.

"He just can't catch a break," Tim summarises. Caught in the middle of a mega-conspiracy, players get the pleasure of guiding Manny through one string of dilemmas after another until, with a lot of hard work behind him, he eventually does get a break.

It is here, in the guiding, that *Grim Fandango* really begins to noticeably stand out from the adventure games that had come before it. Featuring not only a pre-rendered 3D world, but also forcing mouse-hugging adventure game enthusiasts to interact with it through more tactile keyboard controls, *Grim* did everything it possibly could to anger the purists at a surface level.

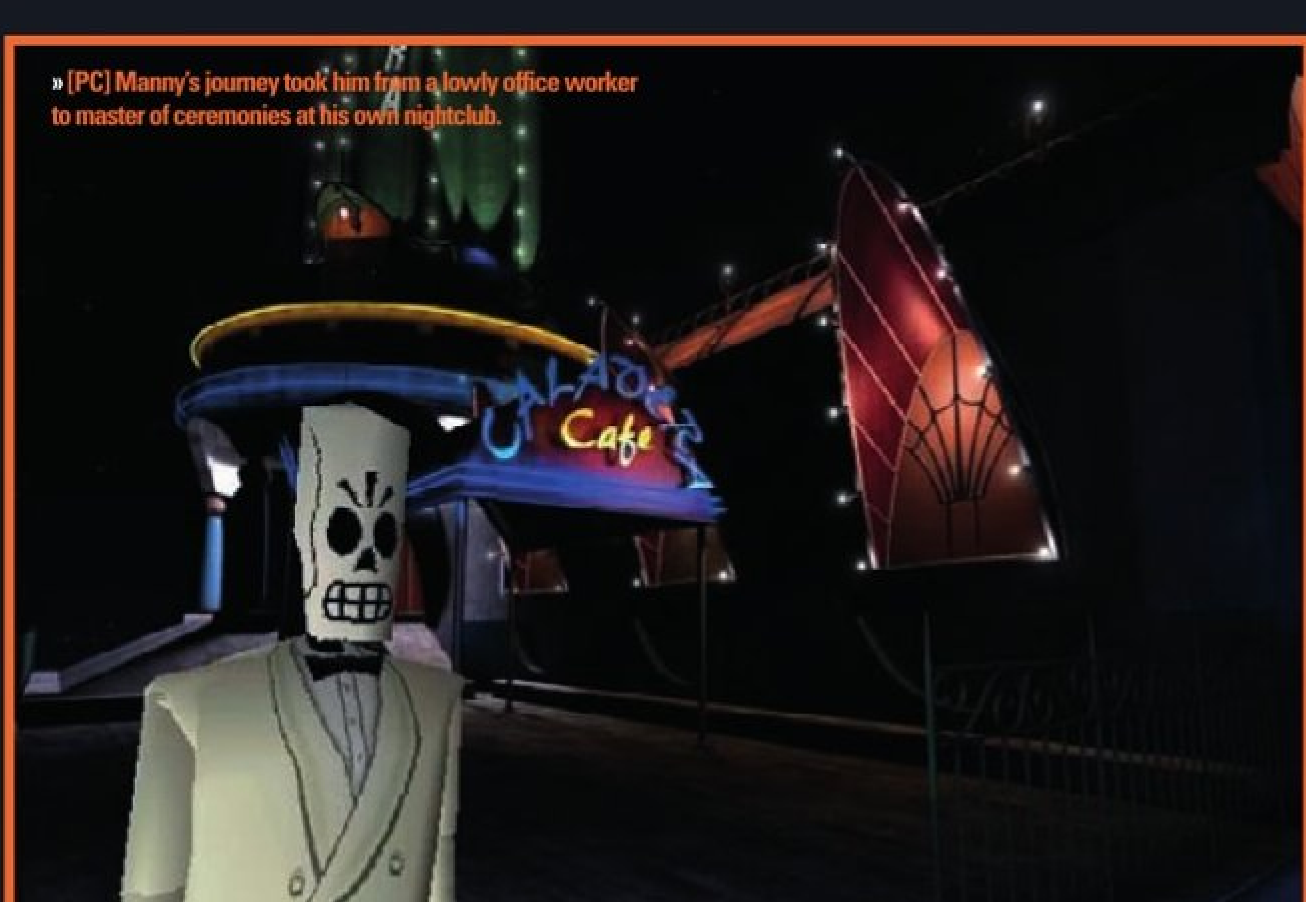


» [PC] Beneath *Grim Fandango*'s anarchic humour and point-and-click puzzles, there was an epic, touching love story waiting to be discovered.

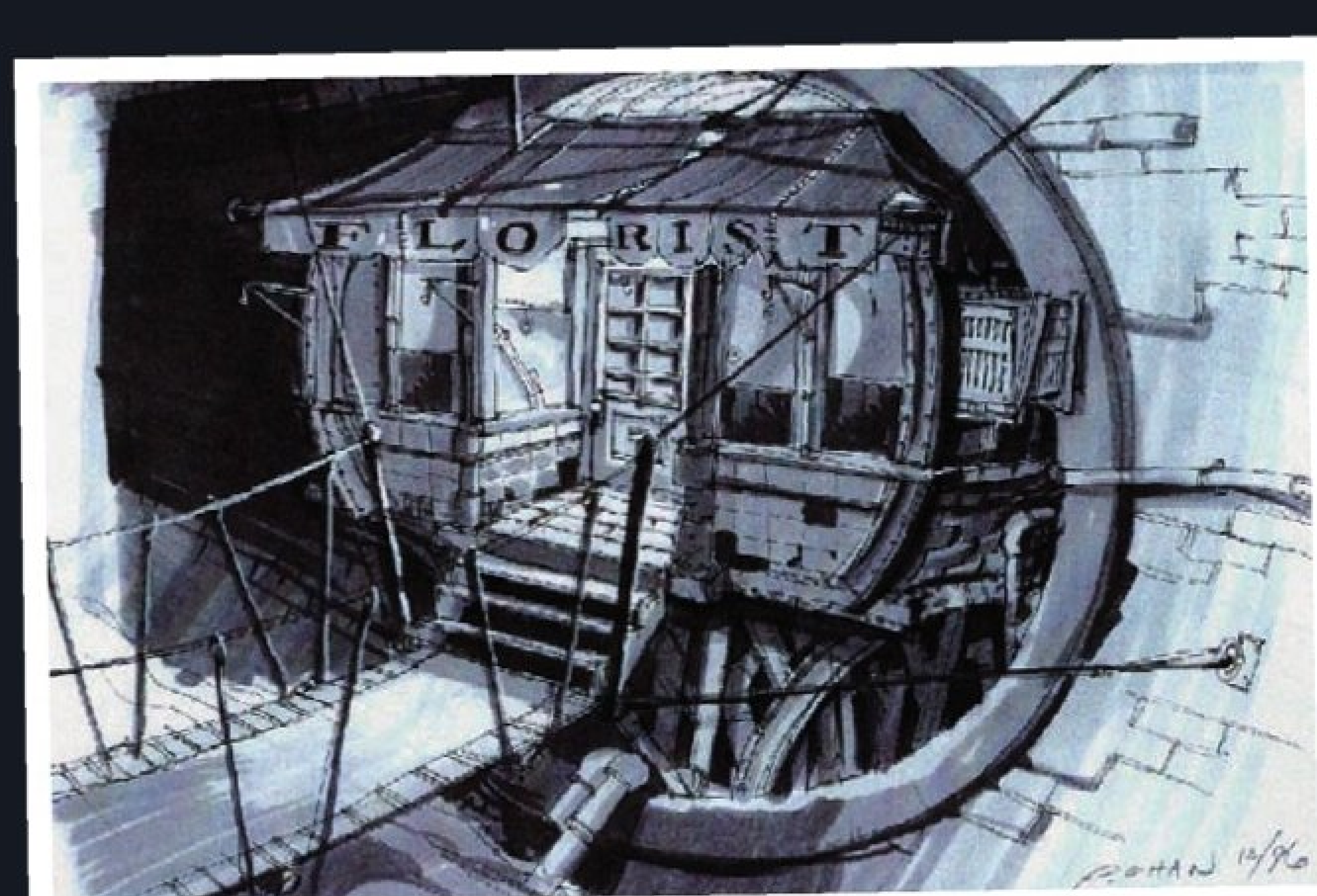
"I was really worried that people would accuse us of selling out with *Grim Fandango* because it went 3D," Schafer says. "But that didn't come up. We weren't trying to make this niche game – we were trying to make a big and exciting 3D game."

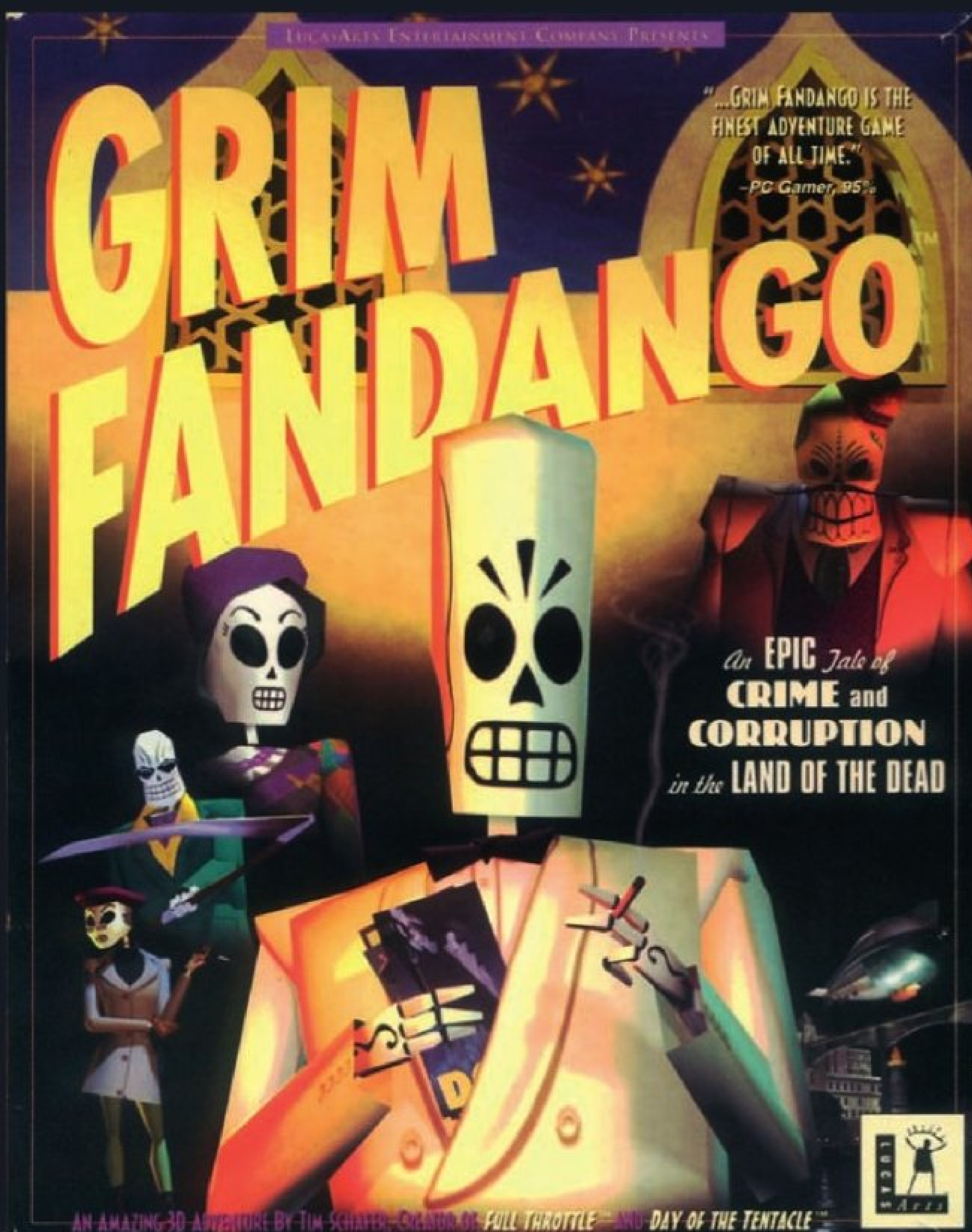
Not that working with 3D didn't induce internal worry. Very few polygonal games from the late Nineties look anything other than downright vile, and it's thanks to an eye for interesting influences and some legitimately fantastic visual design that *Grim* is one of a select few that hold up today. "I didn't want to [make a 3D game] because they were so ugly; the games were just so gross. Character models looked like all their body structure was painted on their outside; it was like this shell they were wearing, which looked horrible. And then I saw those papier-mâché skeletons from the Day of the Dead folk art and they did the same thing – they painted the bones on the outside shell – but it looked awesome. I thought this was what 3D art looked like, only here it was done with style."

A curious case of artistic approach affecting much of a game's setting and key plot ideas, *Grim Fandango*'s mix of Mexican folklore and noir tropes was a stroke of genius. Beside a narrative focusing on greed and corruption, even the small things fell neatly into place: "The concept of taking wealth to the afterlife with you was a part of the inspiration for using the Land of the Dead as a plot element. I read stories about people putting gold in the coffins of dead people to go to the Land of the Dead,



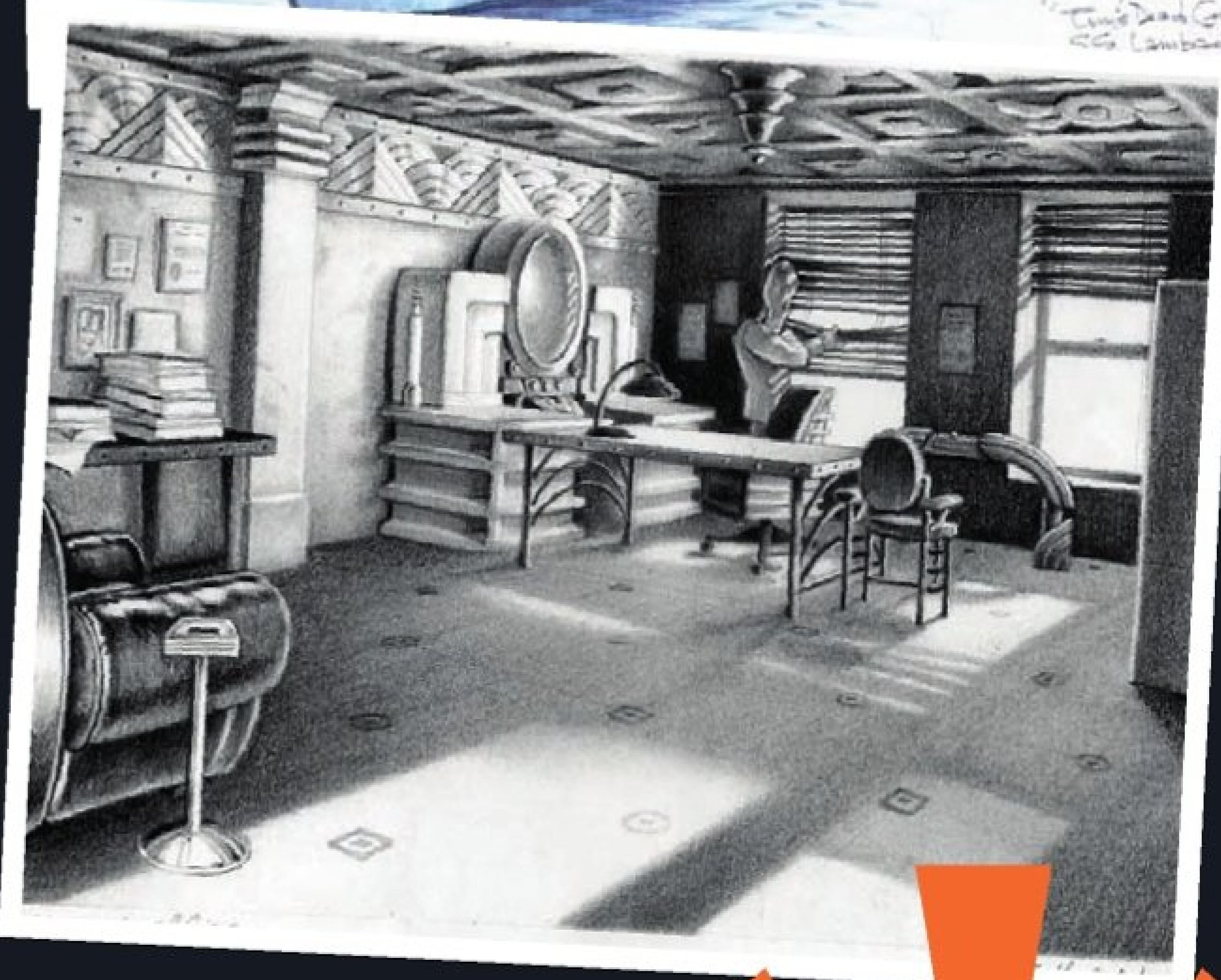
» [PC] Manny's journey took him from a lowly office worker to master of ceremonies at his own nightclub.





» [PC] The box art for *Grim Fandango* demonstrates the well of influences that Tim Schafer dipped into in order to flesh out Manny Calavera's journey. All that was missing was a shot of Glottis with his tongue hanging out – though there was one on the back.





hiding some of the gold in the lining of the coffin. Why would they have to worry about that? Is the coffin being stolen by spirits? Why would the spirits want money?"

Broken down into four chapters, each one representing a year from the four-year journey to the Land of Eternal Rest, a few coppers would certainly help anyone in *Grim*'s world to kill the time. There was bound to be plenty of it. After some backlash over *Full Throttle*'s then-short eight-or-so hours of gameplay, the team working on *Grim* were careful to ensure that the 40-hour claim that would inevitably end up on the box wasn't all hot air: "I did actually calculate in advance the number of puzzles that should be in *Grim Fandango*; even though I was really happy that *Full Throttle* had sold so much, it got reamed for being short. I went through and I counted all the puzzles in *Full Throttle*, and there were basically 20 puzzles. I basically came up with the idea that there should be 40 puzzles in *Grim*. I think. I made a chart. It was either 40 or 80."

At first perfectly broken into four chunks of equal length, a few cuts were eventually made, particularly in the third act. "A lot of stuff got cut out of year three," Schafer admits. "We had a big frog that ate you – we mostly just cut stuff so it could get done on time. And by 'on time' I mean 'two years late'."

Clearly, *Grim Fandango* represented a huge leap in ambition for the development team. Much like the transitory journey through the Land of the Dead itself, they were as caught up in the evolution of development standards as everyone else. When the dust settled, however, they continue to stand victorious where many other games from the same era have succumbed to obscurity.

"You know that I didn't actually make *Grim Fandango*, right?" Tim told us as we were about to begin the interview. "The guy who made it wasn't happy with the result, so he took his name off of it." We replied that, were that the case, considering the game's legendary status not only among players but also within those working with the genre around the same time, this fictional person would probably have undertaken his own self-inflicted purgatorial journey by now.

"A lot of stuff got cut out of act three… We mostly just cut stuff so it could get done on time. And by 'on time' I mean 'two years late'"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: MS-DOS, MAC, MEGA-CD, AMIGA, ATARI ST, FM TOWNS
YEAR: 1990

MANIAC MANSION: DAY OF THE TENTACLE
SYSTEM: MS-DOS, MAC
YEAR: 1993

FULL THROTTLE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MS-DOS, MAC, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1995

THE CLASSIC GAME

The GG忍 SHINOBI™

In the wake of two excellent and successful *Shinobi* games, Sega found itself with one of the most popular videogame ninjas on its books. With the Game Gear barely a year old, the studio made the decision to miniaturise the series for the portable. The result was one of the best action adventure games released for the handheld, and a *Shinobi* title that pulled the traditional gameplay in five different directions. With the recent announcement from Sega that a new portable *Shinobi* game is heading to 3DS, Stuart Hunt feels the time is right to dust off his Game Gear, load up on batteries and replay Joe Musashi's first miniature mission.

PINK NINJA
The pink ninja is armed with an unlimited supply of powerful bombs, which are very handy for attacking those annoying enemies perching on platforms beneath you. He can also stick to ceilings.



YELLOW NINJA
The yellow ninja attacks using fireballs, which he can charge up to increase their strength, and he can also walk on water. His signature magic creates a temporary electricity shield that protects him from attack.



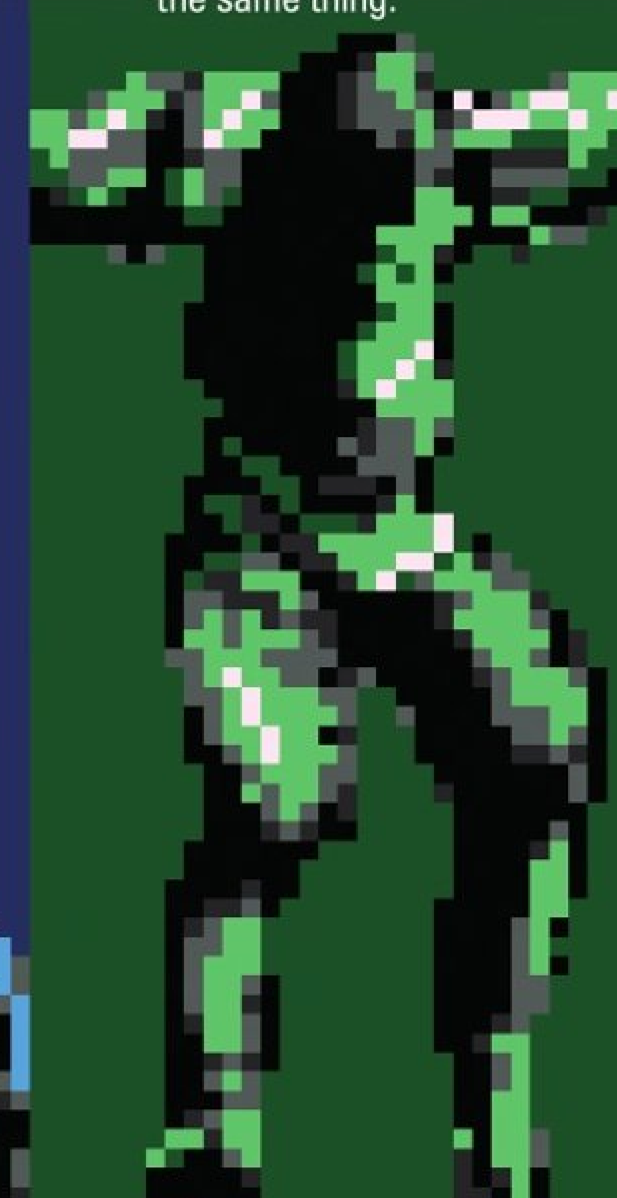
RED NINJA
You start the game as the red ninja, Joe Musashi. He doesn't have any special skills, but his Kitana attack is pretty powerful. His ninjitsu spell causes the screen to shake, killing all enemies and destroying any weak walls on the screen.



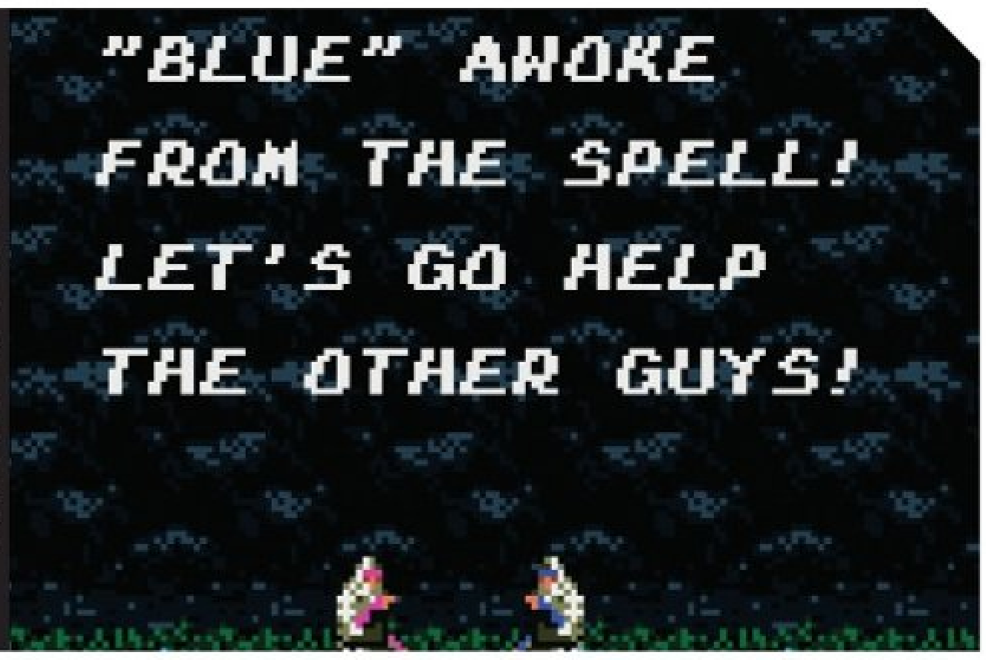
BLUE NINJA
The blue ninja attacks with a grappling hook, and can tether it to pegs to swing between platforms. His ninjitsu magic sees him transform into a tornado that makes him impervious to attacks and allows you to move him anywhere around the screen.



GREEN NINJA
The agile green ninja attacks with throwing stars and can perform a useful double-jump. His magic sees him spontaneously combust to lay waste to all enemies on screen, at the cost of a life – making it pointless considering Red does the same thing.



WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



Best action game on the Game Gear

While the gameplay is very similar to that of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, *The GG Shinobi* does play with the series' conventions. Rather than centre on a single ninja with several attacks, *GG Shinobi* featured a clan of five, each equipped with a unique weapon, special ability and magic spell. You are free to work through the first four stages in any order, with four of these ninjas playing the role of bosses. Once defeated, each becomes playable for the rest of the game. As some stages are easier finished with some ninjas over others, *The GG Shinobi* could be seen to take a leaf from Mega Man's book.

BEST CHARACTER?



The blue twister

With the game designed in such a way that each ninja is given their moment in the spotlight, highlighting a favourite isn't easy. While we feel we ought to award the best character accolade to red ninja Joe Musashi, given that he is the original Shinobi and the only one of the five powerful enough to inflict damage on the final boss, in the end we opted for blue. Not only does he have an incredibly cool weapon/tool in the grappling hook – which we would have liked to have seen Sega use more of in subsequent games in the series – but his tornado Ninjitsu spell is also one of the more useful in the game.

BEST BOSS?



Man versus machine

The *Shinobi* series is renowned for imaginative boss battles, and *The GG Shinobi* upholds the tradition. A bit of a peculiar theme running though the *Shinobi* series, at least one boss fight tends to be against a vehicle of some kind. In the original game you fight a helicopter, in *Shadow Dancer* you square off against a freight train, and in the SMS game *The Cyber Shinobi* you fight a submarine and a bulldozer. In *GG Shinobi*, the vehicular boss is less impressive – a ninja piloting a kit helicopter – but the battle does take place on top of a passenger plane. It's entertaining, but we'd rather have fought the plane.

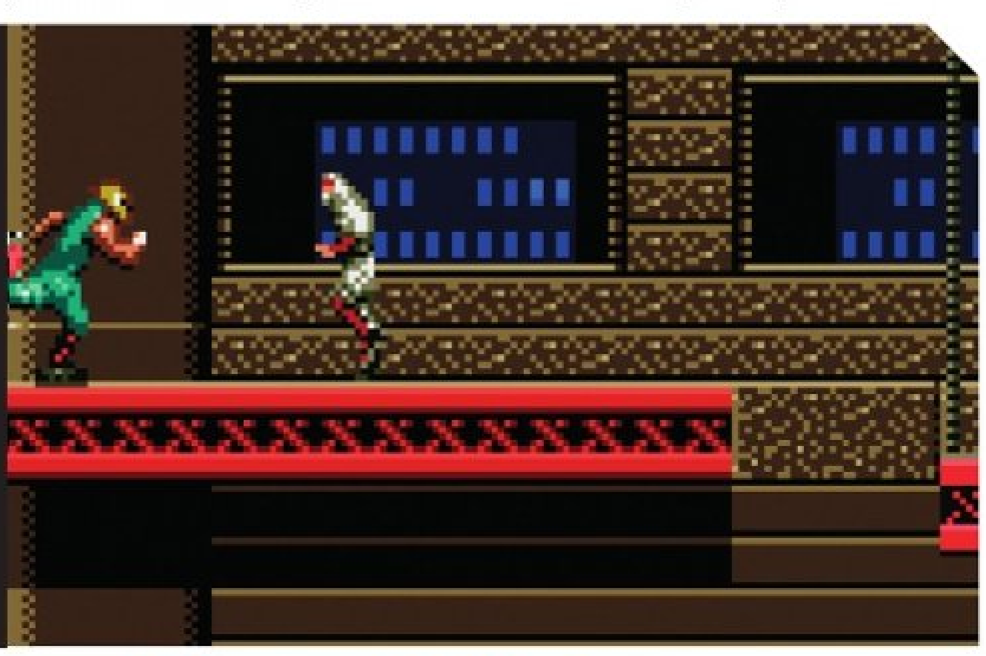
BEST STAGE?



A final test of a ninja's training

Rescuing your fellow ninjas in the first four stages unlocks the final mission: Neo City. Like previous Neo hideouts (such as in *The Revenge Of Shinobi*) this level takes the form of a maze of puzzle rooms, and you're required to repeatedly flip control between the five ninjas to overcome various obstacles. For instance, you could be asked to call upon pink ninja's ability to attach to the ceiling to avoid some deadly after burners, or use green's double-jump to access unreachable areas. Though this stage is tricky, it shows off the excellent level design in the game and provides each ninja a workout.

THE SEQUEL



So good they made it twice

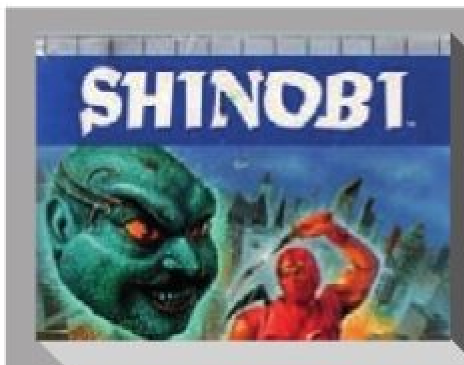
Sega released a sequel to *The GG Shinobi* the following year. It kept things similar to the first game, with the biggest tweak *The GG Shinobi 2: The Silent Fury* makes to the formula being the addition of crystals. With a crystal on each stage to be collected to unlock the final level, often requiring the skill of a specific ninja, depending on the order that you progress through the levels there could be a bit of backtracking. Add in more of the same great action though, more entertaining boss fights, plus a very handy password system, and the sequel is as good, if not better, than its predecessor.

BEST FEATURE?



It packs plenty in

The aspect of *The GG Shinobi* that impresses us most is the huge amount of variety. As well as featuring a posse of five ninjas, each with their own unique weapons and characteristics, each level is split into distinct sections and has its own selection of unique enemies. Because of this, the game never becomes repetitive – well, until the point where you must refight all the bosses in Neo City. The fact you can play the first four stages in any order also added a nice change from the *Shinobi* games of old. The variety and surprising amount of choice make it one of the best games in the series for many fans.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** GAME GEAR
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** ACTION

What the press said… ages ago



Mean Machines, 90%

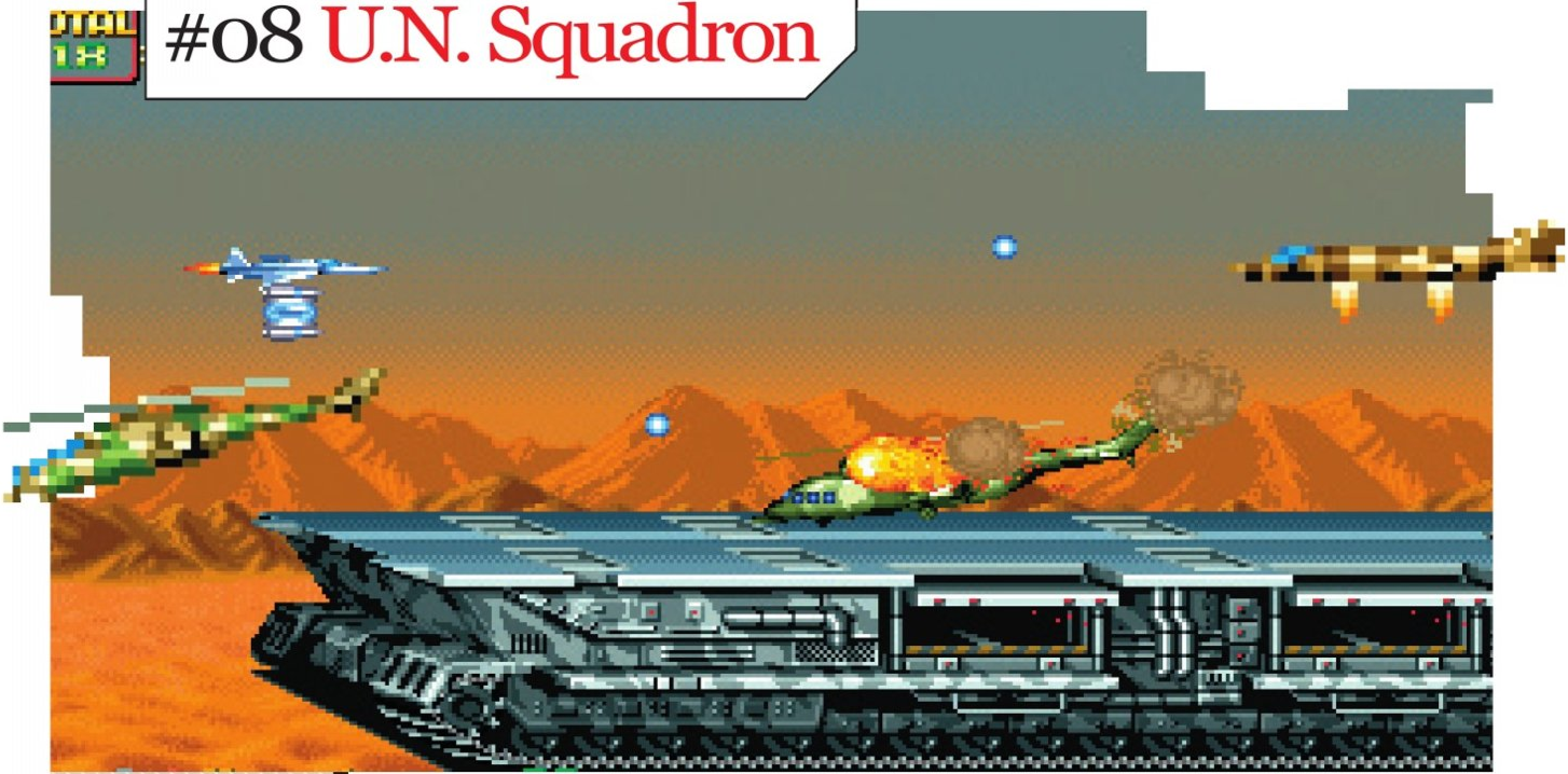
Sporting excellent graphics and some genuinely addictive gameplay, this is a superlative beat-'em-up. The action is exciting and challenging, and there are many neat aspects which keep you coming back for more.

What we think

With engaging gameplay, stunning-looking visuals and some superb in-game music from Yuzo Koshiro, in the Game Gear's relatively small exclusive library of games, the *GG Shinobi* games are some of the best action titles to be released on Sega's battery-chomping handheld.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

#08 U.N. Squadron



Instant Expert

The game is known as *Area 88* in Japan, and is based on a manga series of the same name.

***U.N. Squadron* was** directed by Kihaji Okamoto, who designed *Forgotten Worlds*, *Three Wonders* and *Side Arms - Hyper Dyne*.

Capcom released a sequel, *Carrier Air Wing*, in 1990. Outside of Japan it is known as *US Navy*. It's famous for featuring a character that resembles Sean Connery.

***U.N. Squadron* was** ported to the Spectrum, C64, Amstrad and Amiga. These conversions were developed and published by U.S Gold, except for the Amiga version, which was developed by Tiertex Design Studios.

The *Area 88* Manga series ran between 1979 and 1986 and was one of the first to receive English translation. It was later adapted into a video and anime series.

There are a number of differences between the arcade and SNES conversion – different weapons and aircraft and the removal of a two-player mode.

On the SNES the character Mickey Simon is renamed/misspelled 'Mickey Scymon'. Ought to have really been 'Skyman', we think .

The excellent sequel, *Carrier Air Wing*, was never converted to any console or computer.

This month Stuart Hunt invites you to buckle up, and take off into the danger zone with Capcom's blistering war-based shooter U.N. Squadron. But before all that, let's begin with a lengthy mission briefing…

In the Eighties, shoot-'em-ups had dominated amusement arcades, and a large proportion had a science fiction theme. A relationship that can be traced to Taito's seminal 1978 smash *Space Invaders*, subsequent iconic arcade releases such as *R-Type* and *Gradius* further helped enrich sci-fi's prominence within the genre, and the two have remained close bedfellows ever since.

With hindsight, it comes as no surprise that many game designers saw sci-fi as such an attractive theme to base their games around; it gave their creativity carte blanche to go wild. Want your bulbous spaceship to do battle against something with a robotic exoskeleton head and the body of an armadillo? In the realm of sci-fi, anything is possible. Therefore, when a more po-faced war-based shooter came along that supplanted the spaceships for fighter planes and Bydo Empires with simply more fighter planes, it understandably looked a little bit dull by comparison.

In 1989 though, Capcom released a war shooter that oozed quality, epic bosses and such high levels of graphic finesse that it was impossible not to take notice. Of course, Capcom already had one successful fleet of plane-based shooters already on its books with its *19XX* series. Debuting in 1984 with the game *1942*, the vertical shooter became one of the developer's most popular arcade genres in the Eighties. It is understandable that Capcom felt it could capture lightning twice.

Unquestionably helping *U.N. Squadron*'s popularity soar further was the fact that it was based on a splendid manga series titled *Area 88* (which is also *U.N. Squadron*'s Japanese title). Created by Kaoru Shintani, it is the Japanese mangaka's most famous work, and is notable for being one of the first Japanese comic books to receive a Western translation.

The series' faintly comic story told the tale of a promising pilot named Shin Kazama whose life takes an unfortunate turn. Enjoying his place as the top student in a prestigious flight school, and dating the pretty daughter of a wealthy airline president, Shin's world is turned upside down after he is fooled by a jealous friend into signing up for three years' service at a mercenary air force base known as Area 88. Deciding to work his socks off so that he can buy his way out of the contract, Shin soon discovers that he is a natural fighter pilot. With his talents not going unnoticed by his bosses, Shin climbs the ranks inside the base, while a battle of moral principles is sparked inside the pilot as he grows to despise all the killing he's forced to do, but understands that it might be his only ticket home.

The game adaptation takes the form of a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up that is split into ten devilishly tricky stages. The underlining mission sees you trying to prevent a tyrannous organisation known as Project 4 from seizing control of Area 88 – the last bastion for the good guys – and ultimately taking over the

Pixel Perfect

The war machines of U.N. Squadron get shoved up your arsenal…



» Pick-up



» Air Mine



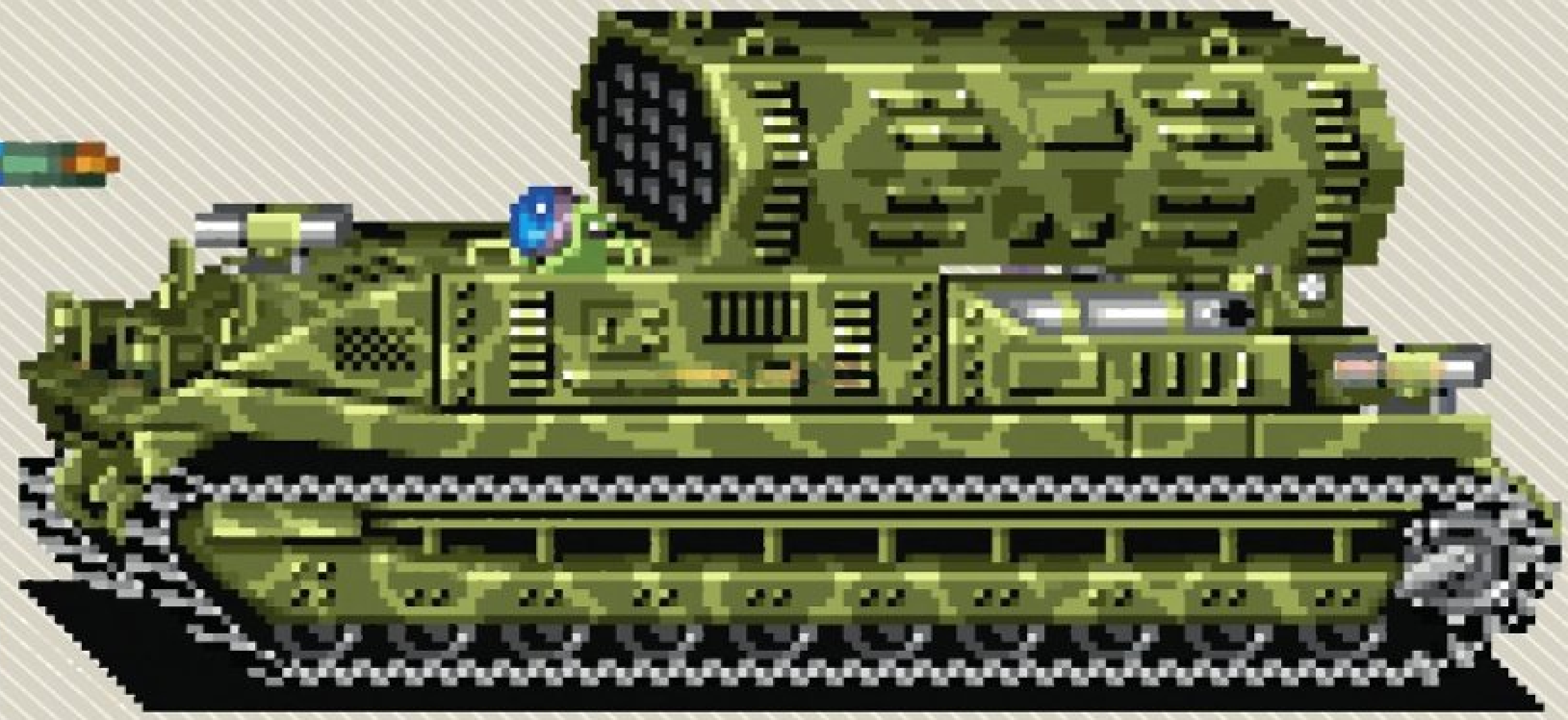
» Large Fighter



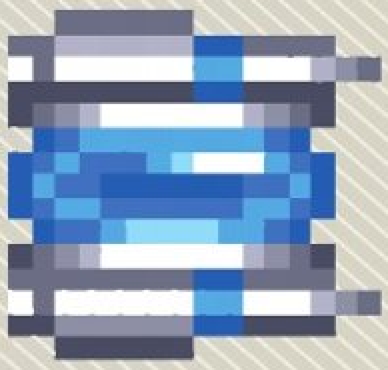
» Large Turret



» Camo Fighter



» Multi-Rocket Launcher



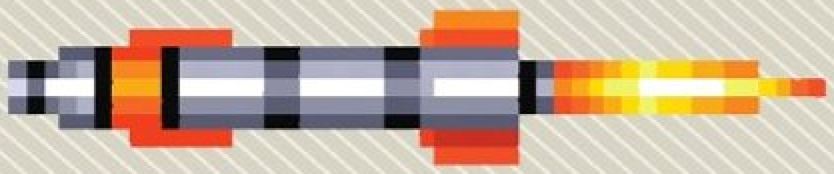
» Power-up



» Red AA Tank



» Tank



» Enemy Rocket



» Shield



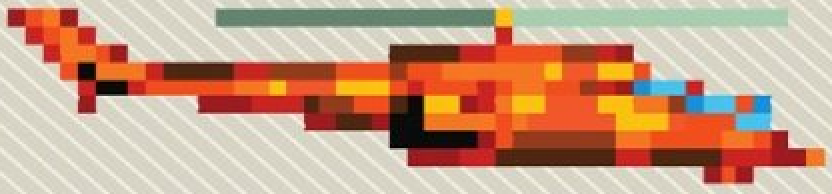
» Camo Helicopter



» Bullhead



» Turret



» Red Helicopter



» Large Helicopter



» Missile Truck



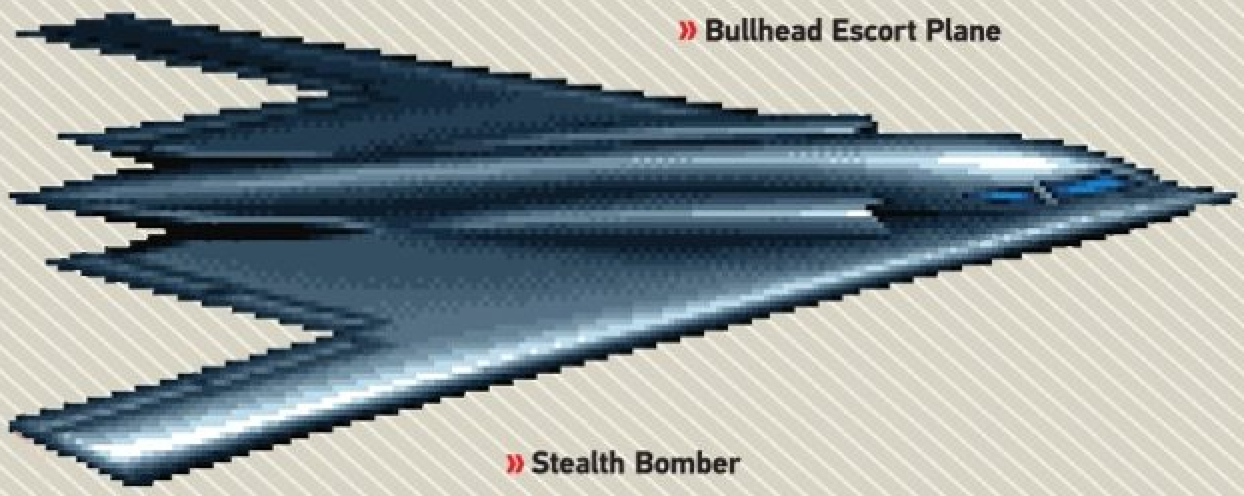
» Bullhead Escort Plane



» Flame Turret



» Desert Tank



» Stealth Bomber

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"Featuring knockout graphics, stunning sound, superlative gameplay and a tough challenge, U.N. Squadron (or Area 88 in Japan) is one of the best blasters available on any system"

– MEAN MACHINES , ISSUE 12

Twin Galaxies High Scores

ARCADE (SINGLE-PLAYER)

- **NAME:** DWAYNE RICHARD
- **POINTS:** 1,960,400

MAME (SINGLE-PLAYER)

- **NAME:** RUDY CHAVEZ
- **POINTS:** 1,439,050

world, or something along those lines. You are giving the option to control one of three characters: Shin, Shin's friend US pilot Mickey Simon, and Greg Gates, a Danish freelance pilot/Mario lookalike who provides comic relief in the manga series. Each pilot has a signature plane with unique fire type. Shin's F-20 Tigershark can only fire forward, as can Mickey's F-14 – though it fires bullets at a slower rate that are larger in size – while Greg's A-10 Thunderbolt has the slowest and weakest main fire of the three planes but can simultaneously fire at the ground at 45 degrees – extremely handy for wiping out ground targets.

U.N. Squadron also featured an array of weapon upgrades and power-ups to add an element of customisation. In similar fashion to earlier shooters such as *Fantasy Zone* and Capcom's own *Forgotten Worlds*, these items were purchasable and made available via an item shop. With selection limited to the amount of money you had successfully banked in the game, earned by shooting down enemies, a degree of strategy came from you weighing up whether to buy up what you could afford at the start of each stage, or save your money so you could splash out on the more expensive armaments later.



» [Arcade] *U.N. Squadron* was ace in two-player, making it all the more odd that the mode was omitted from the SNES version..

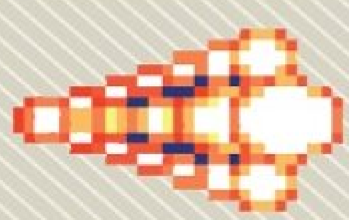
U.N. Squadron ran on Capcom's all-singing, all-dancing CP System (CPS-1). The cart-based arcade hardware powered some of the developer's biggest arcade hits, including *Final Fight*, *Strider*, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Street Fighter II*, and *U.N. Squadron* is a particularly great showcase for its power. Its levels are crammed with detail, there are loads of enemy types, and its gargantuan bosses stretched multiple screens. The backgrounds also featured multiple layers of parallax scrolling and deformable objects, and everything maintained an incredible pace, with little slowdown occurring when the action got chaotic, which was quite often.



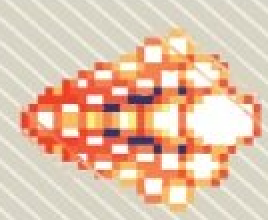
U.N. Squadron was a popular arcade game but became a household name when it was later converted to the Super Nintendo. An early release for Nintendo's 16-bit console, on first inspection the port looks faithful, but Capcom made a number of tweaks to the gameplay, the most notable of which saw all three pilots no longer tied to one plane, with purchasable aircraft unlocked as you progressed, and players given the freedom to decide the order they attacked some levels. It also added new weapons and power-ups to the mix, as well as bonus rounds that saw the pilots destroying a convoy of enemy supply trucks to earn bonus points. Finally, and to the chagrin of fans, Capcom also made the game single-player only, as it had controversially done with *Final Fight*. Nevertheless, it is a fantastic port, and in terms of the best shooters on the machine stands comfortably beside the likes of *Axelay*, *Super R-Type* and *Gradius III*.

Power-ups

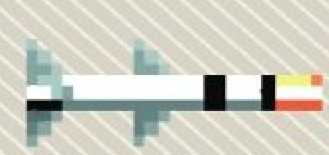
Guns, guns, guns. And more guns. Here's our rundown of the full weapons in U.N. Squadron



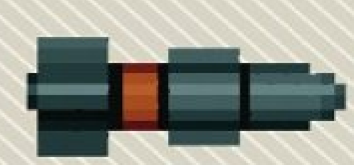
» Bulpup
Launches powerful missiles straight ahead. This is your first weapon upgrade.



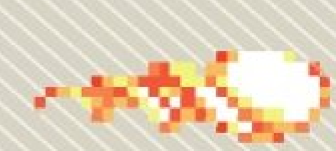
» Bulpup II
Basically an enhanced version of the Bulpup – the missiles are more powerful.



» Phoenix
A useful weapon, it releases powerful missiles that home in on enemy craft.



» Falcon
An upgraded version of the Phoenix, its missiles create more damage.



» Super Shell
Fires a fast concentrated stream of shells ahead of the plane.



» Super Shell II
Okay, this is just getting silly now – an upgraded Super Shell.



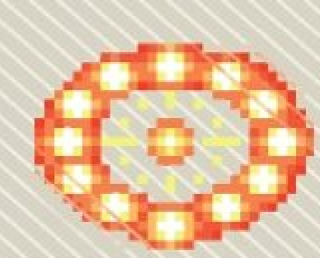
» Bomb II
Enables your plane to drops bombs and effectively take down ground targets.



» Napalm
Works in a similar way to Bomb II, but impact creates a trail of flames.



» Round Laser
Fires a powerful and large ring of fire. It's one of the most effective weapons in the game.



» 16-way Shot
A defensive weapon that unleashes a shield of bullets that surround the plane.

Memorable Moments

We rocket through the bits of U.N Squadron that were planely the best

The U.N. trifecta

Having the option to select different crafts was nothing new to shooter gaming, but in *U.N. Squadron* the feature is done really well, with each pilot given their own personality, and individual fire types that make them stand out from each other.





Upgrades

Before the start of each mission, you visit this guy. He's basically Area 88's Q, and fixes you up with various weapon and power upgrades. There is a charge for his services though. Those Area 88 bigwigs are tightwads.



Taxing tank

The first stage takes place at a radar installation. It's a cheery-looking stage, but don't be fooled into thinking it settles you in slowly; it's a challenging opener, and ends with the pilots battling this massive missile-launching tank.



Capcom's black bomber

The second stage ends with a battle against a stealth bomber, which, judging by its mass beside our ship can't be all that stealthy. A better-proportioned version of this boss featured on the game's US flyer.



Bring a wingman

U.N. Squadron really comes alive when you're playing with a friend. You can live out your Maverick and Iceman fantasies without anyone thinking it weird. Well, less weird. Shame the SNES version forces you to fly solo.



The forestry decommission

The end of stage three sees the pilots trying to destroy an enemy base forged deep in the heart of a forest. One of the more challenging bosses in the game, you're repeatedly forced to fly over the base until its main cannon is destroyed.



Grand canyon

Mission 5 takes place in a gorgeous canyon that does a splendid job of showing off the impressive amount of parallax scrolling there is in the game. Try not to become too distracted by the pretty views though.



Cave glory

Stage 6 sees the pilots entering a cave base to destroy a huge missile launcher deep inside. The tight corridors and falling rocks in this stage make it one of the trickiest missions in the game.



The sub standard

A large submarine emerges from the depths of the ocean. Thankfully, it's a sensible size and doesn't pose much of a problem. The same cannot be said for the boss of this stage, however – a heavily armed battleship.



Bydo frigape

The final boss is an incredibly tough nut to crack. Strikingly similar to the iconic frigate in *R-Type* – even the way you attack it is similar, as you have to reach its energy core – the entire level takes the form of an epic boss battle.



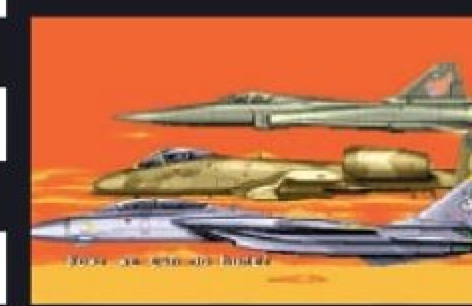
SNES-sational

The SNES conversion certainly looked to be a faithful version of *U.N. Squadron*, but a play reveals that Capcom made a number of fundamental changes to the gameplay, including slightly different/altered levels.

After nine intense stages, the final mission sees Shin, Mickey and Greg trying to decommission Project 4's giant air fortress. It's an epic boss fight that recalls R-Type's iconic frigate stage. After the battle, U.N. Squadron flashes up a number of different end animations, depending on the collection of a hidden pick-up – unlocked by achieving certain criteria – in each level.







Enemy Briefing

Three pretty good words to best describe *U.N. Squadron*'s bosses are: monolithic mechanical monstrosities. Dwarfing our heroes' planes by a considerable margin, if Project 4's armada of ships, planes and fortresses isn't filling up screen space – and basically giving your plane very little room to manoeuvre – they're formidable forms stretching across several screens, requiring a combination of grit, patience and dextrous flying to defeat. Here's our guide to the ten enemy targets in the game.

STAGE 1 THE MULTI-ROCKET LAUNCHER

The first boss in the game is this gargantuan missile launcher. It might look to be an imposing opening boss but it's actually quite easy to defeat. Not only does it hold its position at the far right of the screen but its only means of attack are standard and homing rockets. Therefore this big blighter can be eradicated with some simple up-and-down flying while holding down the fire button. Hint: fly up when he's firing rockets, fly back down when he's not.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 2 STEALTH BOMBER

The 'invisible stealth bomber', as you can clearly see from this screenshot, isn't actually invisible. In fact, given its huge size we'd argue that it's bloody uber-visible. Anyway, this second stage boss doesn't pose too many headaches – if you're quick at taking it down, that is. You see all those things in the sky that look like Chinese Lanterns? They're floating mines dropped into the sky by the bomber, and collision with them is deadly. Therefore a good tactic is to initially concentrate on avoiding the mines rather than precision firing on the target, but then immediately switch tactic the second it starts to fire off indestructible missiles: basically at this point you want to take it out as quickly as you can.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 3 FOREST FORTRESS

This is the point at which the difficulty of *U.N. Squadron* steps up a gear. The boss of this stage takes the form of a huge enemy base armed to the teeth with turrets that are in turn armed to the teeth with rockets. The most annoying sections of the base are the two large laser-firing turrets that bookend the weak spot of the facility. To destroy the base you actually only need to take out the core. As soon as it appears on screen, hammer it with everything you've got. Two low-pass flybys should provide you with enough time to seal the deal.



Difficulty rating:

STAGE 4 CARRIER

This target is basically just an aircraft carrier, but with one interesting difference: it travels on land rather than sea. Yep, those crazy chaps at Project 4 have successful mated a tank with an aircraft carrier, and the zany result is this. It's another one of *U.N. Squadron*'s long bosses, and it attacks by letting off fighter planes and missiles straight up in the air, which are a bugger to dodge. In any case, you must either dodge or shoot down its attacks until you reach the thing that looks like a muscle car engine. Unleash everything you've got at this and this land-based supership will promptly sink into a sandy grave.



Difficulty rating:

STAGE 5 BAYSON

The giant bomber Bayson is one of trickiest bosses in *U.N. Squadron*. While its giant stature suggests it should be a comfortable target, it proves anything but a fly in the park, as its tail gun fires an insane amount of bullets that prove difficult to evade. Meanwhile, at the same time it's doing this, it occasionally drops enemy fighters into the mix to distract your attention. A good tactic is therefore to keep your distance from Bayson so that you can give yourself as much time as possible to react to its exhausting attacks.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 6 MISSILE LAUNCHER

A very similar boss to the carrier that closes Stage 4, this missile carrier attacks in a similar manner, launching a combination of fighters and missiles in the air, but with the added danger that this time fighters will occasionally show up on the scene and drop napalm everywhere. As before, work your way towards the core found at the end of the launcher and keep firing at it until it eventually gives up the ghost.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 7 BULLHEAD

Oddly, despite its late appearance this is actually one of the easiest bosses. Bullhead is a freight plane escorted by two large fighters. Neither guard plane is capable of taking a lot of damage, so a good trick is to keep pummelling Bullhead with gunfire and missiles until his bodyguards arrive on the scene, and then turn your attention to them. Once the two fighters are destroyed, Bullhead is pretty easy to pick off.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 8 MINKS



An odd name for a battleship – it sounds like a name you'd give a cat – but nevertheless Minks is one of the best boss fights in the game. To sink this huge and ridiculously named battleship you have to take out all of the giant gun turrets that are positioned on its deck. This is no easy job, as Minks has plenty of turrets, plenty of secondary guns, and basically enjoys throwing an awful lot at you at once, including kamikaze pilots. As with Stage 3, failure to destroy the targets in one fly pass will see your plane swing by for a second attempt. If you're skilled enough you should be able to finish the fight in two attempts.

Difficulty rating:

STAGE 9 ARSENAL

As this screenshot shows quite ably, this boss pretty much chucks a barrage of enemy and gunfire your way. This tricky target takes the form of a bunker that is protected by a giant telescopic tower made up of eight mini-laser and rocket turrets. In addition to these, enemy fighters also enter the fray. As you don't need to destroy the individual cannons to destroy the tower, our advice is to simply fly as low to the bunker as you possibly can (exactly as we've done in the shot below), and concentrate on the bottom turrets. Most of the enemy fire directed at you will simply pass overhead, with the exception of a few kamikaze planes and bullets that can easily be taken care of.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 10 PROJECT 4 FORTRESS



In what could be a possible homage to the third stage in *R-Type*, the final mission of *U.N. Squadron* is one big boss battle against Project 4's giant air frigate. The fortress is absolutely massive in size. As such, the majority of this battle is taken up with avoiding gunfire, rockets and lasers long enough to eventually reach its only weak spot. When you've reached this point, you must blast a way to the ship's core, being careful to avoid the damaged debris that breaks free. This is incredibly tricky, as you are given little room to manoeuvre when you're inside the air vessel, and you have to dodge a constant barrage of lasers and regenerating gun turrets that protect the core. Dextrous flying and steady nerves are your only hope, though if you've managed to get this far you've already proven you have what it takes.

Difficulty rating:

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO

VECTOR



GAMES

In the beginning there was light… Strange geometric shapes whizzing and spinning across countless arcade monitors, enthralling a generation of gamers. Mike Bevan explores the phenomenon of the vector game, with the help of some of the pioneers who carved their names in the phosphorescent hall of fame

When the first wave of vector games breezed into arcades in the late Seventies, they turned heads in a way no other kind of videogame had done before, and with good reason. Vector graphics are a remarkably pure method of modelling on-screen imagery, through the mathematical language of points and lines, rather than the pixel building blocks of raster graphics, typified by games like *Space Invaders*. "In a vector graphic system, also known as an XY display system, images are created by lines, which can be drawn in any arbitrary direction, at any chosen length," explains Howard Delman, co-engineer of the arcade hardware that powered Atari's *Asteroids*. "The function of the vector generator hardware is to create the electrical signals necessary for commanding the vector display."

Simply put, it's the vector generator that paints the visual geometry of these games, be it a tank in *Battlezone*, a TIE Fighter in *Star Wars*, or the wedge-shaped ship in *Asteroids*, engraved by the high-voltage electron beam of the arcade monitor. Created when the beam strikes the phosphor-covered screen, emitting its energy as visible light, vector displays offer a pin-sharp clarity and resolution that's unique among arcade games of their time. With their distinctive black backgrounds and glowing, clean lines, they produce a light show that's both incredibly pretty and almost hypnotic to the eye. As Cinematronics vector pioneer Tim Skelly puts it, it's like staring into a fire.

"What made the vector games special to me and vector players of the time was a combination high refresh speeds and smooth movements, something missing from the chunkier bitmapped games," Tim exclaims.

"I think part of the initial appeal of vector graphic games was their unique look," agrees Howard. "Certainly, *Lunar Lander* [Atari's debut vector title] could have been a raster game. However, vector graphic technology made it much easier to develop first-person games."

The relative ease by which line-drawn vector images could be rescaled in real-time meant they were the ideal method for creating the first simplistic 3D gaming worlds. Compare the blocky, skewed graphics of Atari's 1976 raster driving game *Night Driver* to the vector-based visuals of *Speed Freak*, released a couple of years later, and the superiority of the technique is plain to see. Another early 3D vector game, Cinematronics' *Tail Gunner*, flew smoothly animated enemy starships over your head although, as its title suggests, locked you firmly in position on screen. 1980's *Battlezone* took the next logical step, allowing arcade-goers to traverse a 3D environment for the very first time.

CINEMATRONICS AND VECTORBEAM

Speed Freak and *Tail Gunner* were the work of Larry Rosenthal, the canny innovator who first hit upon the idea of using vector technology in arcade games. While a student at MIT, Rosenthal became fascinated by *Spacewar!*, the granddaddy of videogames, which had already inspired Atari founder Nolan Bushnell to create *Computer Space*, the first arcade videogame, using raster technology. Rosenthal developed a monochrome vector display system called Vectorbeam and created *Space Wars*. Due to his insistence on a then unheard of 50/50 profit split, the only US manufacturer willing to take on Rosenthal's game was Cinematronics, a company that Skelly says "had done a couple of cocktail knock-offs and was about to go under". It turned out to be a smart move – *Space Wars* was very successful, becoming one of the top ten earning arcade games over the three-year period spanning 1978-80, and shifting 30,000 units.

Tim remembers Rosenthal as a man of few words. "My first encounter with Larry was when I visited





Cinematronics prior to being hired," he recalls. "On my part, I spoke little because I had no idea what to ask. What answers I did get from Larry were short and not terribly informative. He simply did not say much to anyone."

If Cinematronics wasn't exactly over the moon about Rosenthal's equal profit share on *Space Wars*, it was even less impressed by his next move – jumping ship to form his own company, Vectorbeam, leaving Skelly to pick up the pieces. As Tim recalls, "They had nothing except me, a legal pad and a pencil to get them a new game to build and sell.

"My first game design for Cinematronics was a hang-glider game, but it never worked in practice," he reveals. "It used too many long vectors and, frankly, it was a pretty bad design. I had not yet gotten used to the limitations of the system, and it took me a little while to come up with games that worked well with short vectors. That was not as difficult as it seemed to me at the time. Just shrinking my images made most things work, at least from the position of the hardware. Obviously, it would have been great to fill up the screen with lots of detail, but in the long run, with coloured overlays in games like *Armor Attack* and *Star Castle* and the reflected artwork in *Warrior*, I got by. All of my games were built around limitations.

"*Star Hawk*, my first game, created the illusion of 3D, but that was a two-dimensional cheat. I created it by scaling the size of the space ships to look as though they were moving forward and backwards. For a *Star Wars*-type trench animation I added a repeating background. However, Larry Rosenthal's Vectorbeam games, *Speed Freak* and *Tail Gunner*, used three-dimensional rotations, which required slightly more advanced computations, which, I must say, were spectacular for their time."

Although Tim is modest about his debut, a number of his later vector games had considerable influence within the industry. *Star Castle*, an almost primal game concept where players blast rings of concentric shields to reveal a nasty surprise, went on to form the basis for the Atari VCS classic *Yars' Revenge*; *Armor Attack* updated the *Tank*-style combat game with considerable panache, the helicopter enemy being a particular standout; *Warrior* was the first one-on-one fighting game, albeit one viewed from an unusual overhead view; and *Rip-Off*, a frenzied battle to save valuable fuel pods from swarms of pesky aliens, was the first co-operative two-player arcade game.



» *Rip-Off* was the first arcade game to feature co-operative gameplay

BEHIND A VECTOR CLASSIC



"*SPACE DUEL* WAS a game originally designed by Steve Calfee and Rick Mauer, but Rick left the project fairly early, and I took it over, working with Steve to enhance and finish the game. *Space Duel* was supposed to be the first colour vector game, but when *Asteroids Deluxe* was released, they decided another *Asteroids* was not a good idea so soon, and the hardware was handed over to Dave Theurer for *Tempest*. It started with rocks as a colour *Asteroids*, but I changed that when *Asteroids Deluxe* came out. It needed to be different, and I created the 3D objects instead. It was always planned as a two-player game, with the co-operative play right from the start. I enhanced the connected ships, and set the rules for them being destroyed, but that was Rick and Steve's original idea."

OWEN RUBIN



BEHIND A VECTOR CLASSIC

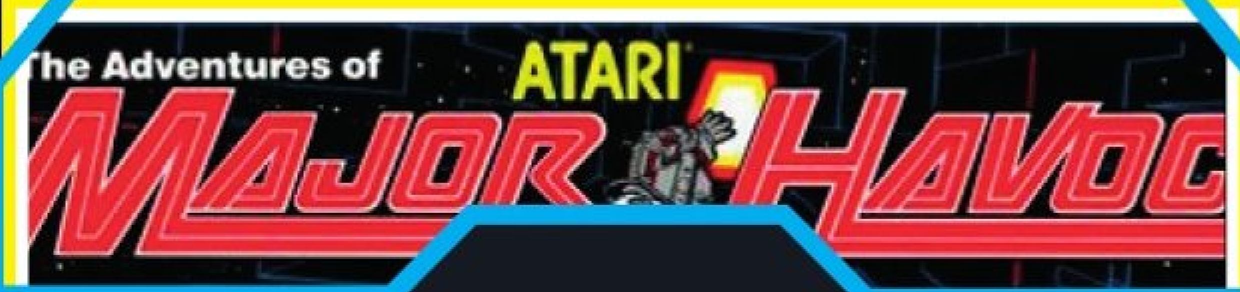


"*STAR CASTLE* HAD many fathers. The game, which began as a Vectorbeam title, started as a simple shooter where the goal was just to last as long as possible. The Vectorbeam configuration was to have the player in the middle of a ring of shields. When Cinematronics purchased Vectorbeam and acquired the game, Scott Boden and I were tasked with making it a much more interesting title. The primary difference was putting the enemy in the centre, which left the player free to move and attack at will. At the time I was working on other projects; I believe *Armor Attack*. So, most of the credit goes to Scott's excellent programming and insight. My contributions were pivotal, such as switching the position of the attackers, but Scott made several excellent changes that made the game what it is known for today."

TIM SKELLY



BEHIND A VECTOR CLASSIC



"I WAS BEING obnoxious when I created that game. It started as *Tholian Web* (based on the *Star Trek* episode) as a space game and grew from there. The third space wave in the final game with web spinners is a modification of that gameplay. The game was heavily influenced by the original *Battlestar Galactica*. I started to build a maze with a character running inside the ship, and Lyle Rains liked the idea and did some drawings of Major Havoc, which we both enhanced as the game progressed. I created an animation routine to make him look good, and the maze level was born. So now I wanted a way to go from space into the ships themselves to use the maze part, and the marriage was born. The game just kept on growing and Mark Cerny joined to complete the last four or five waves, which is why they are so difficult!"

OWEN RUBIN



BEHIND A VECTOR CLASSIC

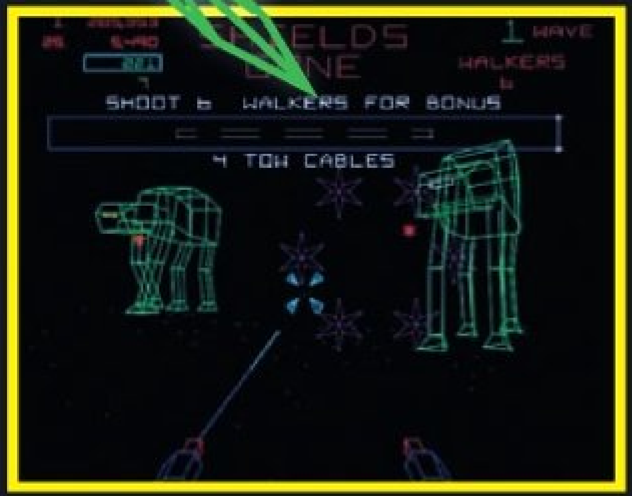


"THERE WAS A 'retreat' at Pebble Beach to which the engineering group went for a few days. The rule was that you had to bring two game ideas and pitch them to the rest of the attendees, who would then grill you for specifics, many of which had to be made up on the fly. There was a stack of single-page game themes as I recall, and *Black Widow* was among them – it showed a spider building its web and not much more. I let my imagination loose and came up with enough elements to pitch. For the controls, originally I tried forward/reverse/fire buttons, but it felt awkward in that you were constantly trying to spin 180 degrees to shoot behind you. We had a *Robotron* game in the common area, and many of us had calluses from wrenching the joysticks. We wired up two sticks and that's the way it ended up…"

BRUCE MERRITT









ROCKS IN SPACE

Cinematronics' achievements in the vector game field hadn't gone unnoticed by Atari, which was desperate to regain a foothold in the arcade market, half a decade on from *Pong*. Engineers at Atari's Grass Valley facility had been quietly conceiving a vector display system of their own, later dubbed QuadraScan.

"I remember being invited to a demonstration, when some of the Grass Valley engineers came down to our Sunnyvale labs to show us what they had been working on," says Howard. "I was asked to take the vector generator hardware and polish it up so that it could be used in an actual game. Rick Moncrief was tasked with doing the same for the vector display monitor."

For Atari's first vector game, Howard was inspired by another mainframe computer game, resulting in the moon-hopping arcade simulation *Lunar Lander*. "There was certainly a competitive desire to match Cinematronics and provide great games," says *Lunar Lander*'s programmer, Rich Moore. "*Space Wars* was a very enjoyable game to play, and I think served to set a great standard to aspire to." *Lunar Lander* was moderately successful, with 4,830 units sold at $1,695 a pop, but it was with its second vector game that Atari really hit pay dirt.

Ed Logg and Atari executive Lyle Rains had been working on a raster game called *Planet Grab*, but, during a stint tweaking the vector character set for *Lunar Lander*, Ed realised the potential of the system. "Raster displays were 320x240 pixels, which is not good enough to tell what you were aiming at," says Ed. "From my work on *Lunar Lander*, I knew the vector display was 1024x768, which was far superior." *Spacewar!* again provided inspiration for what became Atari's bestselling arcade game of all time: *Asteroids*. "I remember the hardware was basically done when I started, and the *Lunar Lander* board I used had just a few modifications," he adds. "For graphics I used some graph paper to design the ship, which was patterned after the *Spacewar!* ship, and the four asteroids."

The image of a lone ship dodging a monochrome crossfire from hostile flying saucers and interstellar debris is one that's iconic of Eighties arcade gaming. One by-product of the *Asteroids* hardware is the memorable light-trail effect as certain images, particularly bullets, travel across the screen. "Vector displays have this property – the phosphor glows from the electron beam," says Ed. "I believe I remember this on the PDP machines in 1971 too. It had a nice effect, but it was not intended."

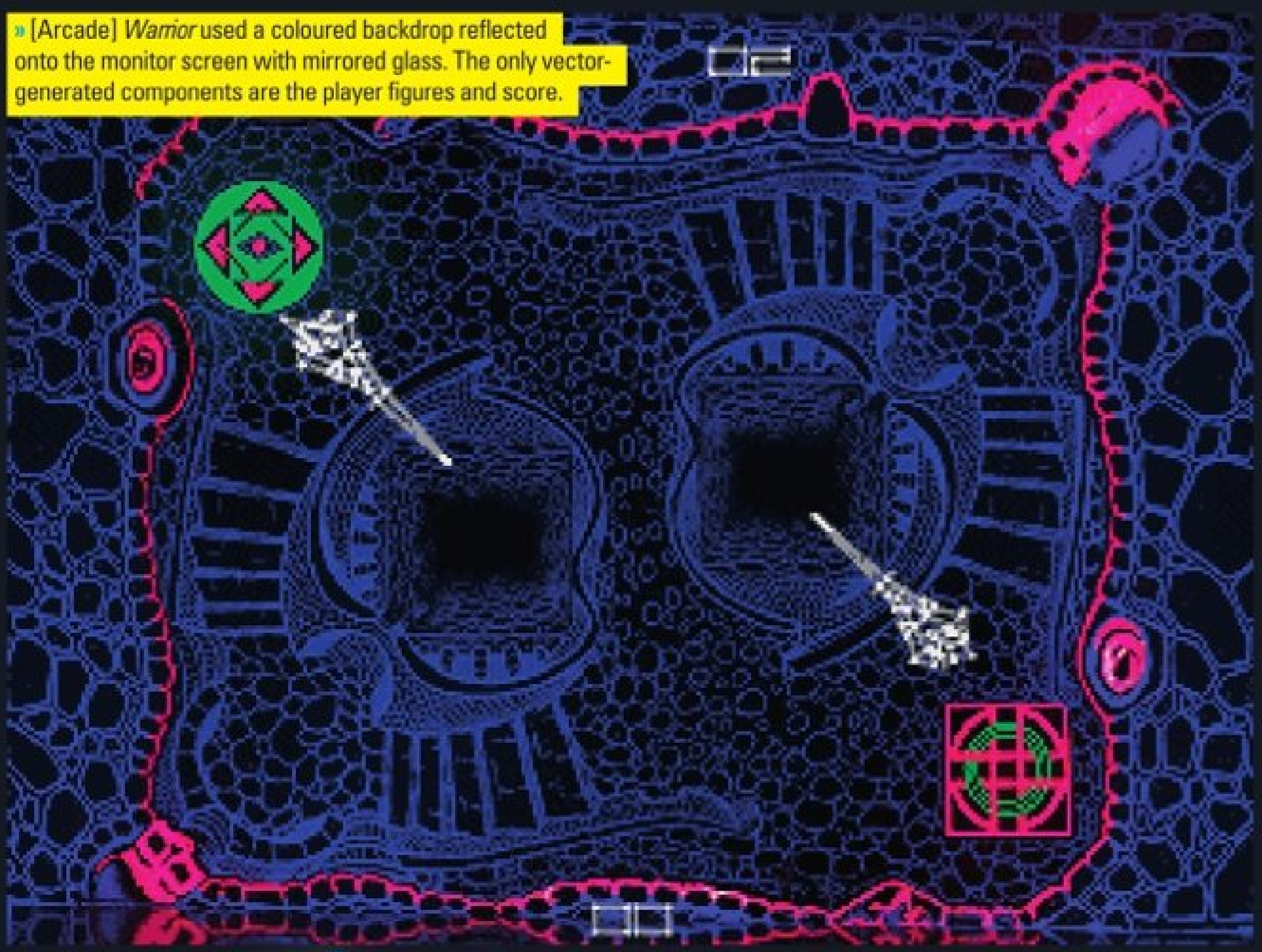
The popularity of *Asteroids* led to a sequel, *Asteroids Deluxe*, which added shields for the player's ship and an unmistakable blue tint.

> "The lone ship dodging flying saucers and interstellar debris is iconic of Eighties arcade gaming"

Throughout Atari's early vector phase, Howard and his colleagues continued to improve the hardware. "One noteworthy addition was a specialised board that was known as the 'math box', which was developed for *Battlezone*," he says. "The math box was a specialised arithmetic processor. It was microcoded specifically for the purpose of performing the computations needed for a first-person game."

PLANES, TANKS AND BUGS

"*Battlezone* was an attempt to exploit the advantages of the vector



» [Arcade] *Warrior* used a coloured backdrop reflected onto the monitor screen with mirrored glass. The only vector-generated components are the player figures and score.



generator and do a game in true 3D, which had not been done before," says designer Ed Rotberg. "For 3D games, we didn't have the processing power to do a decent job of hidden-line removal, and not being able to fill polygons was a huge limitation. The graphics had to be drawn out on graph paper, or drawn as traditional mechanical drawing, with dimensions of each line specified so that I could convert them to the object format that I had designed to use."

Lunar Lander's Rich Moore exploited the math box for another 3D arcade project. "*Red Baron* was in development the same time as *Battlezone*," he says of his WWI-themed flying game. "At the time, I was essentially a one-person game team. Ed Rotberg provided a number of improvements and suggestions to algorithms, which I utilised in the game." Both games featured simplistic environments with jagged, pyramidal mountains, which were still surprisingly effective.

"Another significant modification was the addition of colour," says Howard. "From the perspective of the vector generator, this addition was no more difficult than it was to add colour to traditional black and white raster games. The technology challenge, however, was developing a colour vector display monitor. The bulk of the credit for that achievement has to go to Rick." Atari's first colour vector game, *Tempest*, showcased the new technology beautifully. Played out across a succession of web-like backgrounds, infested with memorably named enemies such as Flippers, Spikers, Pulsars and Fuseballs, Dave Theurer's shoot-'em-up was daringly original, and visually stunning.

Tempest set a benchmark for the stylish and imaginative use of colour vectors, which freed designers from the restrictions of monochrome displays and coloured plastic overlays. The three so-called QuadraScan Color games that followed – *Space Duel*, *Gravitar*, and *Black Widow* – are equally worthy of celebration, if less well known. *Space Duel* was a colourful *Asteroids* spin-off featuring abstract enemies and spinning 3D shapes. One enjoyable aspect was the fact that two people could play co-operatively, their ships tethered together, requiring careful co-ordination to stop either player's momentum throwing off the other. "The biggest limitation of the vector technology was how many vectors one could draw," says designer Owen Rubin. "In *Space Duel*, you occasionally hear a 'pop' sound when you shoot an object. The pop is the object disappearing because I can't draw any more objects on the screen, as it would result in flickering and a slowdown of the game."

Gravitar, a pleasing mix of *Asteroids* and *Lunar Lander*, featured an interactive level-select screen where players chose which planets to tackle, blasting alien craft along the way. The game's turreted planetary landscapes later inspired the 8-bit classic *Thrust*. The fast-paced twin-stick shooter *Black Widow* was the

EIGHT GREAT VECTOR ARCADE GAMES



ASTEROIDS

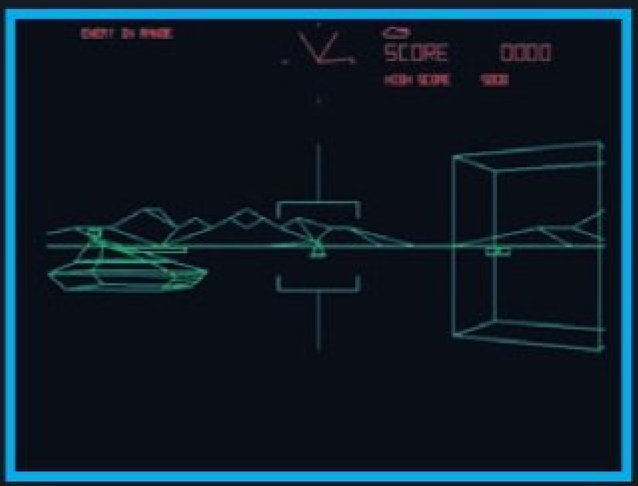
» **Released:** 1979
» **Publisher:** Atari

■ The beauty of *Asteroids* lies in its simplicity: two buttons to rotate your ship, one to fire, one to thrust, and one to enter hyperspace, if you were feeling particularly suicidal. "In *Asteroids* it was just you out there, trying to survive," says Ed Rotberg. "You had to keep your eyes constantly in motion around the screen because the danger could be coming from any direction, at any time, and it was always imminent. It's an incredibly intense game."

BATTLEZONE

» **Released:** 1980
» **Publisher:** Atari

■ Anyone who remembers *Battlezone* in the arcade will probably agree that the feeling of peering down the game's viewfinder into a green-tinted virtual world was astounding at the time. The intuitive dual-stick controls, surreal cube-littered landscape and lovingly rendered tanks, missiles and saucers made it a truly immersive experience. The game's 3D technology was so impressive that the US Army approached Atari to request a modified version to train drivers of its Bradley tanks.





TEMPEST

» **Released:** 1980
» **Publisher:** Atari

■ With its abstract geometric imagery, which creator Dave Theurer claims came to him in a dream, *Tempest* remains one of the most hypnotic arcade games of all time. Flitting your bizarre claw-like avatar around the edges of a tube from which hundreds of nasties emerge and try to kill you, it's nerve-wracking and brilliant. As Theurer puts it: "There's a certain class of games where you just get into a trance when you're playing them. As long as you're in this trance you'll do fine."

STAR TREK

» **Released:** 1982
» **Publisher:** Sega/Gremlin

■ The success of the second *Star Trek* movie, *Wrath Of Khan*, influenced the production of this fine vector title, which plays like a real-time version of the old turn-based mainframe computer game of the same name. *Star Trek* is notable for its split-screen tactical display, which works surprisingly well, and blasting hapless Klingons is very satisfying. *Major Havoc*'s Owen Rubin counts himself as a fan of the game back in the day. "A simple game, but I liked it," he says.



bona fide *Robotron* of vector games. As designer Bruce Merritt puts it, *Black Widow* is "best played with two 'manly' joysticks to properly allow body English and cabinet-rocking". On an original arcade machine it remains a fantastic 'in-the-zone' experience, as you battle to clear your spider's web of wave upon wave of hostile, sometimes explosively volatile bugs. One notable element, the Bug Slayer, a computer-controlled ally that helps to destroy enemies, was a clever workaround to the restrictions of the vector hardware. "When we had pretty much the maximum number of objects/vectors on screen, we needed a way to thin the herd to allow another bad guy to be spawned," explains Bruce. "The Bug Slayer served that purpose." The level-select system, allowing immediate access to higher levels and massive bonuses, has a certain familiarity about it. "*Tempest* was the source of this," admits Bruce. "I had one of our artists draw up the different expressions ranging from boredom to disbelief. He had fun with that…"

THE LAST STARFIGHTERS

By 1983, as Atari's remarkable *Star Wars* hit arcades, the days of vector graphics being the superior platform for arcade games were numbered. Dave Theurer's *I, Robot*, the first arcade game to feature filled polygon graphics, demonstrated that technology was shifting. "It's hard to imagine how we could have done *Battlezone* in raster in 1980," says Howard. "But by the mid-Eighties, the decreasing costs of memory and processors allowed for the development of polygon generators that were affordable for arcade machines. In time, the realism that could be achieved with traditional raster technology made vector technology less desirable."

"Atari was the company that pushed the tech to its greatest heights"

It's fitting that Atari's final trio of vector games are some of its finest, particularly from a technical point of view. *Star Wars* was the perfect movie-to-game adaptation, the film's famous climax fully realised in vibrant coloured vectors. Owen Rubin's *Major Havoc* managed to combine two completely different game styles – a 3D space shooter and a scrolling platform maze game – in one. The transition between the two phases, as the major's starship docks with a space station and he enters the maze, features some incredibly nifty vector animation. Other clever tricks include hidden-line removal and even a sparkling *Star Trek*-style vector. "It's a hardware trick, not software, which is why MAME cannot make it work," says Owen. *The Empire Strikes Back*, released as a conversion kit for *Star Wars*, featured notably improved vector detail, as players raced to down Imperial AT-AT walkers in their snowspeeder. Released in 1985, it was Atari's last vector arcade game.

Although a handful of other companies jumped on the arcade vector train, Cinematronics and Atari were always frontrunners, and Atari the company that pushed the technology to its greatest heights. "Atari was usually at the top simply because they had more money and more people," says Tim Skelly. "But even without that advantage they would still have been strong contenders. They were a great crew and [we] had a friendly rivalry. I think because of that all of us benefited."

In turn, the designer of the bestselling vector game of all time has a soft spot for the games of his then-rival. "*Star Castle* was one I mastered very quickly and could play as long as I wanted," says Ed Logg. "But my real favourite was two-player *Rip-Off*. As a one-player game it was not very good, but I played this with another co-worker for many months. I still remember the co-operative aspect of this game. I wonder if it had influence on *Gauntlet*?"

Vector games: providing fun and inspiration for nigh-on 40 years. Long may they glow.



» Atari's *Star Wars* coin-op remains one of the most successful arcade games of all time.



» *Space Duel* has the unusual honour of appearing on the front of The Who album *It's Hard*.



GRAVITAR

» **Released:** 1982
» **Publisher:** Atari

Think *Lunar Lander* with a fire button, enemies and increasingly complex planetscapes. *Gravitar* was a superb but very challenging game, and Atari later offered a kit to convert it to the more immediately gratifying *Black Widow*. "The pseudo-realistic gravity and the foreshortened centre of gravity made *Gravitar* difficult," says Bruce Merritt. "The learning curve was pretty steep and it cost you repeated quarters to get good enough to survive the 90-second life expectancy."

TAC/SCAN

» **Released:** 1982
» **Publisher:** Sega/Gremlin

One of the few Japanese-developed vector games, *Tac/Scan* is up there with *Tempest* in terms of visuals. The game's unique twist is that players control a V-shaped formation of seven ships, which move and fire simultaneously in response to its spinner controller. As squadron members are picked off by enemy fire, new ones can be collected to replace them. Shifting effortlessly between 2D and third-person 3D shooting sections and an impressive 3D tunnel sequence, it's a belter of a blaster.





QUANTUM

» **Released:** 1982
» **Publisher:** GCC/Atari

Demonstrating the kind of originality made possible by vector technology, *Quantum* used a trackball controller, which players used to 'draw' on the screen. The aim was to completely enclose bouncing atomic particles with vector outlines without making contact with them – far trickier and a lot more engrossing than it sounds. *Quantum* did poorly on its release, but its uniqueness has won fans over the years. We'd love to see an update for modern touch-screen devices.

STAR WARS

» **Released:** 1983
» **Publisher:** Atari

Red Five standing by… *Star Wars* catapulted players into the seat of an X-Wing fighter with real aplomb, despite its famous tower-top blasting section not making much sense in the context of the actual movie. Blasting TIE Fighters into vector shrapnel and dodging walkways and glowing star-shaped munitions in the iconic trench sequence became the stuff of arcade legend. Even today, a working sit-down cockpit version of the game will set you back a pretty penny.



CHARIOT RACE

With galloping horses, fluttering togas and ancient argy-bargy, Chariot Race proved the humble Vic 20 could provide some unique thrills. Paul Drury meets the Hope family in the lounge where it all happened

"You're actually on the sofa where we all used to sit and pack the tapes," smiles Toby Hope, son of Micro-Antics founder Paul.

"After school, folding the covers and instructions, putting the tapes in," recalls youngest daughter Jo. "I was five and it was my first job!"

"We grew up with computer games and they caught our imagination," adds her elder sister, Sam. "As a child, I remember picking up one of his books full of ones and zeroes and saying 'Daddy, when I grow up, I want to read binary!'"

We are sat in the Hope's living room, which back in the early Eighties doubled as a development studio for father Paul and an assembly line for Micro-Antics products. Between 1982 and '83, the company produced four titles for the unexpanded Vic 20, the final and by far the most impressive release being *Chariot Race*. The Roman racing concept, which required you to barge rival charioteers into amphitheatre walls on your way to victory, combined pacey horsemanship with a gladiatorial attitude. Think of it as *Burnout* for the 8-bits.

The game's author, Paul Hope, is asleep in the next room. Since 2009, he has been battling a rare, degenerative brain condition that has left him very weak and unable to speak. His wife, Margaret, and his three children have gathered at home, the former 'family factory', to talk about the Micro-Antics' years.

"He came back with the Vic in 1981, when it had only just come out," begins Margaret. "He bought it to play games, adventure games especially, but then when he saw them, I think he wanted to make his own. Actually, the first thing he did was use the Vic to control some disco lights for children's parties…"

But then, Paul had always been a gadget man. At the age of two, he dismantled the telephone and the grandfather clock, curious as to how they worked. At university, he collaborated with fellow undergrad Patrick Head, now chief engineer at Williams, to design a go-kart that would run for twenty-four hours. When he brought the Vic 20 home, he was employed as an engineer at Honeywell, but at heart he was an inventor, keen to toy with the latest technology.

"All his life he's strived to do different things, extra-curricular activities, and he's always got absorbed by them," says Margaret, softly. "I think that's what I loved about him."

She picks up a copy of *Road Race*, her husband's first game, and smiles at the hand-drawn cover. Toby ruffles through a large pile of invoices and pulls one out from 1982. It states they had supplied Beatties in Wolverhampton with ten copies, to retail at £6.99. Micro-Antics was due to receive £4.34 for each sale, which would have been a profitable arrangement if the title hadn't sold just twenty in total.

Paul's next effort, *Brain Pain*, a pair matching card game, did better, selling several hundred copies and receiving a favourable, four-star review in Home Computer Weekly. More successful still was release number three, a response to his daughter doubting his machine of choice. "All my friends were playing *Frogger* on their Spectrums and I said, 'Dad, why can't we have one of those?'" says Sam. "He would go on about how much better the Vic was than the gimmicky Sinclair…"

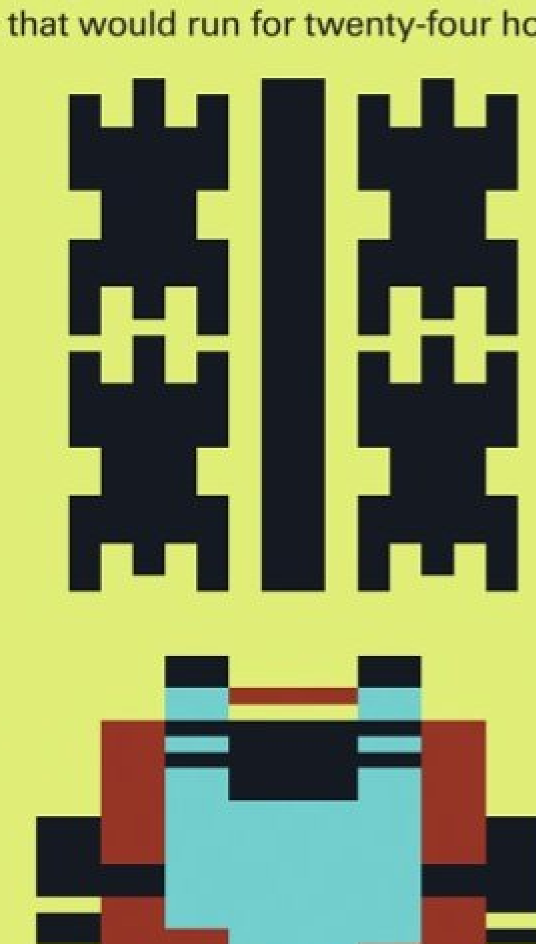
To add weight to his argument, he wrote *Chicken Challenge*. This time, when Toby digs out invoices, they show the company sold an impressive two thousand copies of the game, many through *VicSoft* magazine.

The best was still to come, though. "We considered this the ultimate," smiles Margaret, tapping the shiny *Chariot Race* box proudly. From the striking cover art to the slick gameplay (the reverse of the tape boasts '4.7K of machine code' in



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MICRO ANTICS
» **DEVELOPER:** PAUL HOPE
» **PLATFORM:** VIC 20
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **GENRE:** RACING BARGE-'EM OFF





» Paul's university go-kart project, circa 1970. Patrick Head of Williams is on the far right, with Margaret and Paul next to him.



charmingly nerdy fashion), this was a game that pushed the unexpanded Vic to its limits. The aggressive racing, the atmospheric sound effects and innovative option of two human charioteers battling it out in front of an unforgiving crowd – they throw deadly fireballs at you if your speed no longer amuses them – makes this one of the machine's finest releases.

It sold almost fifteen thousand copies, helped by Margaret's ingenious marketing techniques. "I remember going to Boots and saying, 'Do you have *Chariot Race*? No? Oh, it's a good game by all accounts.' Then I'd phone them up the next day and say, 'I'm from Micro-Antics and we have this game called *Chariot Race*…'"

Yet just as the family firm finally had a hit, Paul decided it was time to leave the circus behind. "He felt *Chariot Race* was the pinnacle," explains Margaret. "He'd pushed the Vic as far as it'd go and he was on to something else."

"It was like the Vic was a mountain, he'd climbed to the top, stuck a flag in and was on to the next challenge," adds Sam.

The great adventurer wakes up, so we go into the next room and thank Paul in person for making the Vic gallop. The machine he coded all his titles on is set up, the several missing keys a testament to the hours he spent bashing out his binary. We play *Chariot Race* against his son as he looks on, though soon find ourselves crushed under hoof after some vicious manoeuvring from the young Hope. We all agree how much fun the game still is, even if Sam says the horses remind her of rodents, like *Ben Hur* with hamsters.

"He loved us all playing together as a family," says Toby.

"His philosophy was to make things fun and let people enjoy themselves," smiles Margaret. "That's lovely, isn't it?"

"It was like the Vic was a mountain. With Chariot Race, Dad had climbed to the top of it and stuck a flag in"

Many thanks to the Hope family for their hospitality, and to Frank Gasking at gtw64.co.uk for his help with this piece.



» The covers of *Chariot Race* and *Road Race* show how far Micro-Antics progressed.

Paul Hope died peacefully at home on June 28th 2011, aged 63, surrounded by his loved ones. This article is dedicated to a remarkable man and his loving family.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROAD RACE
SYSTEMS: VIC 20
YEAR: 1982

BRAIN PAIN
SYSTEM: VIC 20
YEAR: 1983

CHICKEN CHALLENGE
SYSTEM: VIC 20
YEAR: 1983

VIC TEASE

"HE WANTED TO push the Vic to its limits but he didn't want to go beyond the unexpanded Vic," explains Margaret, when we ask if Paul ever considered increasing the machine's puny 5K of RAM through an expansion cartridge.

"I think it's because he never liked that ethos, like Apple have, of designing a product but only releasing a tenth of it so you have to fork out extra for everything," notes Toby. It was an admirable stand but meant no further games followed *Chariot Race*. However, when the Game Boy was released at the end of the Eighties, he did consider taking up the reins once more.

"He did actually get in touch with Nintendo, as he thought that might be a suitable platform for *Chariot Race*," recalls Jo. "Then he realised how much manpower would be involved and how it wouldn't be his…" A pity, as its addictive charms would have suited that blurry monochrome screen perfectly.




















Signature Series

NINJA GAIDEN



In a new feature, we look at a series associated with a particular machine. We begin with a look at Ninja Gaiden, one of the finest and most punishing trilogies to hit the NES, and speak to scenario writer and director Masato Kato

THE BACKGROUND

Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* (*Shadow Warriors* in Europe) was the result of the company's management wanting to produce a game to pander to the tastes of the time. The West was in the midst of a ninja craze in the mid-Eighties, and popular arcade beat-'em-ups starring silent assassins had become commonplace, with *The Legend Of Kage, Ninja Warriors* and Sega's *Shinobi* all preceding *Ninja Gaiden*'s release. And while *Ninja Gaiden* appeared quite imitative upon its release, with its big, broad sprites giving it an air of *Double Dragon,* where it shone brighter than its peers was through its impressive standard of presentation and interactivity.



It was decked out with bold, colourful, lively looking backdrops, as well as a pretty 'out there' story about a nameless ninja travelling to the USA to battle a cult led by a fictional ancestor of Nostradamus, and while Tecmo's ninja might not have gone about his business in a particularly stealthy manner, he was certainly both agile and a master of his surroundings. In stark contrast to heroes in most side-scrolling fighters, he could run up walls, perform backflips, hang and swing from bars, and even kick enemies into telephone boxes and oil drums.

Finding enough popularity for home conversions to follow, it was Ocean Software that acquired the licence for the European home computer ports, putting out conversions of varying quality – some pretty dismal 8-bit conversions for the Spectrum, CPC and C64, but impressively faithful 16-bit Amiga and ST versions by Teque Interactive. The first



console release for the series, though, appeared on the Nintendo Famicom. Designed and developed in-house at Tecmo alongside the coin-op, it was a dramatically different game to its arcade counterpart.

Tecmo's top brass had taken the bold decision to put two different *Ninja Gaiden* games into production simultaneously, with each developed by two separate teams. Led by director Hideo Yoshizawa, whose softography also includes the games *Klonoa* and *Mr Driller*, the NES team moved away from the side-scrolling fighting action of the arcade game and designed its vision of *Ninja Gaiden* as a side-scrolling hack-and-slash platform game instead, with a bigger focus on story; an approach better suited to the technical make-up and market of the console.

A combination of the game's great visuals, slick gameplay and the huge installed base of the NES – some 60 million homes worldwide – saw this 8-bit version eclipse the arcade game in popularity. And, in marking the legitimate introduction of ninja Ryu Hayabusa, it would be seen by many fans as the true birth of the *Ninja Gaiden* series.

THE GAMES

Ninja Gaiden (1989)



When Hideo Yoshizawa was tasked with directing a separate *Ninja Gaiden* for the Nintendo Famicom, his intention was to make an action game for the console that had a bigger focus on story, to expand the series beyond the one-note fisticuffs of the arcade game. It's something that becomes painfully obvious within seconds of sticking the game into the console, as *Ninja Gaiden* begins with one of the most famous openings of any videogame of its time: an incredible animated sequence showing two ninjas duelling in a field at night, a dramatic fight that ends with one losing their life – the father of the series' hero, Joe Hayabusa.

Following the battle, Ryu receives a letter left by his father, giving him instructions to travel to America and seek out an archaeologist friend. What follows is an adventure of revenge spread across six very distinct stages that finds Ryu in the centre of a plot involving the CIA, an evil cult leader, and the resurrection of an ancient demon through the coupling together of two mythical ancient statues.

With this story explained and fleshed out through attention-grabbing cut-scenes that bookend each stage, these animations helped to not only drive the story, but also elevate *Ninja Gaiden* above other action games of its time. In the past, story and exposition in action games was commonly consigned to just a few paragraphs inside a game manual, or some cursory on-screen text before gameplay. To have a story unfurl in-game using anime cut-scenes was uncommon, especially to the level seen in *Ninja Gaiden*. And this high standard of presentation bled into practically all aspects of the game, from its catchy music to its stages that were crammed full of an impressive amount of detail.

Keen to also play up the ninja characteristics of its hero, just like in the coin-op, the NES team ensured that the controls felt responsive, the scrolling was fast and smooth, and Ryu was fitted with a wide array of ninja-style weapons – including his famous Dragon

EXPERT OPINION

We speak exclusively to Masato Kato, scenario writer on the original Ninja Gaiden for the NES, to find out more about the origins of the game

RG: Can you tell us about the origins of the series?
MK: In those days, 'ninja' was getting very popular in North America, and the president invited us to his room and ordered us to create and develop a ninja game for the NES while another team developed *Ninja Gaiden* for the arcade separately. In hindsight, there were no limitations or restrictions to developing the game as long as the concept was right, which was our corporate culture and development atmosphere. After much discussion, Mr Yoshizawa, the director of the game, came to the decision that we should create an action game that focused on the storyline, and we all agreed.

RG: Can you tell us anything about the arcade project?
MK: I'm sorry but the arcade and NES games were totally different projects, so I don't know much about it. I imagine that Mr Iijima, who was the director of arcade action games such as *Rygar* and was a very unique and talented person, came up with the entire setting and story by himself.

RG: Did any other games, anime or films influence the gameplay and characters?
MK: When it came to the NES version, Mr Yoshizawa played and studied a lot about *Mario*. And I don't know if I can say this is an influence, but the hairstyle of Irene in the first game looks a lot like the hair of Rachael in the movie *Blade Runner*. Whenever I see it, I can't help laughing.

RG: How did you come up with the look and design of Ryu Hayabusa himself?
MK: What we considered when we designed the main hero, Ryu Hayabusa, was how we could give him his own originality and make him stand out and be distinguishable from other ninjas. So first we decided to give him a special ninja vest to emphasise his muscular arms. Secondly, as you may see, we gave him a special-looking cowl, which arches out in the front like a bill. Originally we were thinking that Ryu was equipped with various sensors and a small monitor in his helmet and he could check and confirm what was around him. That was our original idea.

RG: The word 'gaiden' translates to 'side story' in English. Does this relate to the game in any way?
MK: No, it doesn't. I think it was named because it simply sounded cool in English in our sense. If we had translated the original title [*Ninja Ryukenden*], it was *Legend Of Dragon Sword*, and we thought it's too long and not very exciting-sounding at all.

RG: With *Ninja Gaiden*, was it always your intention for the locations and environment to play a significant role in the game's design?
MK: Looking back to those days, all of us puzzled over what we could do to create a game that made the best use of unique ninja actions. We thought if Ryu had to just attack enemies only, it wasn't necessary to have him be a ninja.

RG: How did you manage to squeeze so much graphical power from the NES?
MK: I was also in charge of graphics. What we did was to take advantage of the NES and used its spec down to the ground. The number of colours we could use was limited, so I created those graphics by making background and objects live side-by-side. I swear I never used special ninja magic.

RG: Was there anything that had to be cut from the original NES game?
MK: No, nothing was cut from the original game. It may be that the difficulty level was changed a little bit. Back in those days, it was company policy to make overseas versions more difficult.



» [NES] The sand in *Ninja Gaiden III* is not a nice place. If you linger too long without moving, you'll sink to your death.



» [NES] By the time you reach the first game's final act you'll want to be confident in your gaming skill… and your patience.

Signature Series

"What we did was to take advantage of the NES hardware. I swear I never used special ninja magic"

Also appeared on…

ALTHOUGH THE TRILOGY never appeared in its complete form on a non-Nintendo machine, the *Ninja Gaiden* games were ported to other machines individually and sporadically. The first game received a conversion for the PC Engine, which was only released in Japan. This version featured enhanced visuals and a number of subtle changes to the gameplay, such as being able to keep your secondary weapons upon finishing an act. Oddly, the sequel didn't appear on the PC Engine but did make it to the PC and Amiga in the US, while the final game, appeared on Atari Lynx (it also received a conversion of the arcade game). You can now download all three NES games for the Wii's Virtual Console.



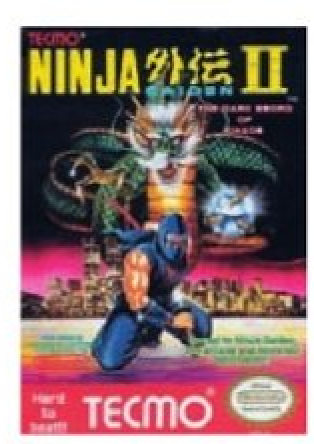
Sword, throwing stars and even some ninjutsu magic. He was incredibly nimble, illustrated best by his ability to stick to walls and spring between them to ascend stages, a mechanic that has been used in countless games since.

But for all its good aspects, *Ninja Gaiden* did have one significant shortcoming: its difficulty. Despite giving you unlimited continues with which to finish the adventure, which was something practically unheard of in a NES game, it was still one of the most challenging games on the console. Its masochistic difficulty level is a result of the game's maddening enemy respawning and placement. Killing an enemy and retreating a small way would annoyingly reset your foes to their original positions, while stopping play to catch your breath often caused them to respawn indefinitely. Bringing further heartache, adversaries would annoyingly loiter on platform edges, making landing on them extremely difficult without reliance on Ryu's secondary projectile weapons, which were limited in supply.

These issues create a notorious final stage. A finale to really separate the videogame savants from the mere mortals, it was divided into three lengthy sections, and each was a gruelling and unforgiving gauntlet that threw everything at the player. This final act even ends on a multi-tier boss battle, which drops Ryu back to the very start of the level should the fight be lost, forcing you to play all three stages again.

The game's slick gameplay and quality shone through, though, and rightfully saw it garner a huge amount of popularity upon its release, and sequels readily followed.

Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword Of Chaos (1990)



Picking things up a year after the first game, the sequel finds Ryu facing off against a new enemy in the form of Ashtar – the master of the previous cult leader who, Ryu discovers, was responsible for ordering the death of his father.

The story is once again a tale of Ryu trying to prevent a demonic uprising, but this time it is one centring on a rescue rather than an actual revenge mission. In the story Ashtar kidnaps Irene, and uses her to draw Ryu's attention while he attempts to use the power of the titular blade to awaken a portal to a demonic realm.

With director Hideo Yoshizawa now a producer, most of the design, story and graphical decisions for the second game fell to Masato Kato, who had worked as an artist on the first game. The levels in the sequel feel far more action orientated and bolder in their design. For instance, there is one stage in the game that sees Ryu fighting across the carriages of a speeding freight train, and two later stages that make inventive use of weather effects: one a tricky mountain level where Ryu has to battle against being pushed around by gale force winds that frequently change direction, and another that sees him relying on lightning to see his way through a stage shrouded in darkness.

Sadly, though, the gameplay was once again hampered by some heinous enemy behaviour, which was now starting to feel par for the course for the series. That being said, the sequel did at least make some enhancements to its design to help make the gameplay a little less impenetrable for players.

Ryu's wall-clinging ability was improved and now allowed players to freely climb up and down walls rather than wall-jumping, and he could use his secondary ninja powers while climbing as well. Ryu's powers also received a bit of a rethink. His signature Art Of The Fire Wheel power, which sees him unleash a diagonal flame attack into the air, could now be fired diagonally downwards as well as upwards, making it far more effective for clearing platforms that are being annoyingly guarded by enemies. But inarguably the most notable new power introduced in this instalment was the Phantom Shadow technique, which gave Ryu the ability to conjure up to two doppelgangers to follow him around and copy his every move. A useful new ability, canny gamers soon discovered that it was possible to position the ninjas in specific parts

THE TRILOGY IN 16-BITS

SUCH WAS THE trilogy's popularity that in 1995 Tecmo re-released the games for the SNES. *Ninja Gaiden Trilogy,* as it was known, contained enhanced versions of all three NES games, with each featuring crisper and more colourful visuals, as well as slightly altered and extended music – much to the chagrin of fans – and a handy password system that was first introduced in the original release of *Ninja Gaiden III.* The third game's infamous difficulty was also toned down slightly by Tecmo's decision to instate unlimited credits, which kept it consistent with its predecessors. Overall, though, the games are generally viewed as weak retools by fans, with the main complaints being that they suffer from unresponsive controls, choppy animation and evident censorship. Nonetheless, released late in the console's commercial life, copies have become highly sought after in SNES collector circles. So, if you're ever fortunate enough to come across a copy, be sure to bite an arm off. Not yours, obviously, as that would just be silly.







SERIES HIGHLIGHTS



■ *NINJA GAIDEN* HAS a legendary opening. It shows Ryu's father murdered by the blade of a mysterious foe. Why was he killed and who killed him? You must find answers.



■ THOUGH THE OPENING stage looks close to that of the arcade game, the similarities end here. The NES game was designed as a side-scrolling platformer and is better for it.



■ RYU STARES OUT towards the ultimate destination in his vengeance mission. This classic scene was reused in each game, until it almost becomes comical by *Ninja Gaiden III*.



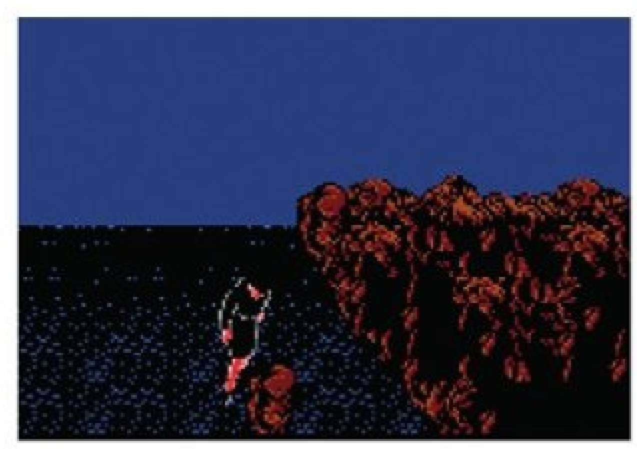
■ *NINJA GAIDEN II* gave Ryu the ability to create helpful facsimiles of himself to assist him. The clones were invulnerable to enemy attacks and copied his every action.



■ ONE OF THE sequel's best stages sees Ryu fighting on a speeding train. Sure, this scenario has been done to death in games, but that doesn't stop it from being any less awesome.



■ ANOTHER STAGE IN *Ninja Gaiden II* tasks Ryu with negotiating a level at night. The only way to see where you're going is to use the lightning flashes, which light the path.



■ *NINJA GAIDEN III* kicks off with another memorable intro. This one sees Irene killed by Ryu, who runs her off a cliff. But is there more to her death than meets the eye?

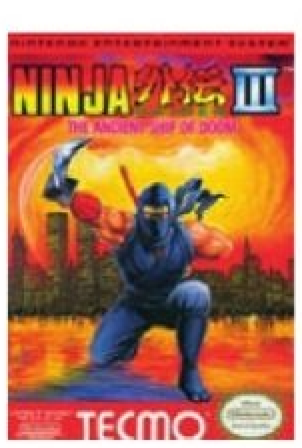


■ *NINJA GAIDEN*'S STAGE 6-2 is legendary among fans for its difficulty, and so for this reason probably deserves a mention. Finally beating it is pretty memorable.

of the screen, allowing them to be used strategically, especially against the bosses.

Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword Of Chaos is a strong sequel and certainly an easier game in comparison to its sadistically tough predecessor. While its story is less absorbing, overall the improvements and tweaks that Tecmo made to the gameplay created a more enjoyable *Ninja Gaiden* episode. But Ryu's NES tenure wasn't quite over yet…

Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship Of Doom (1991)

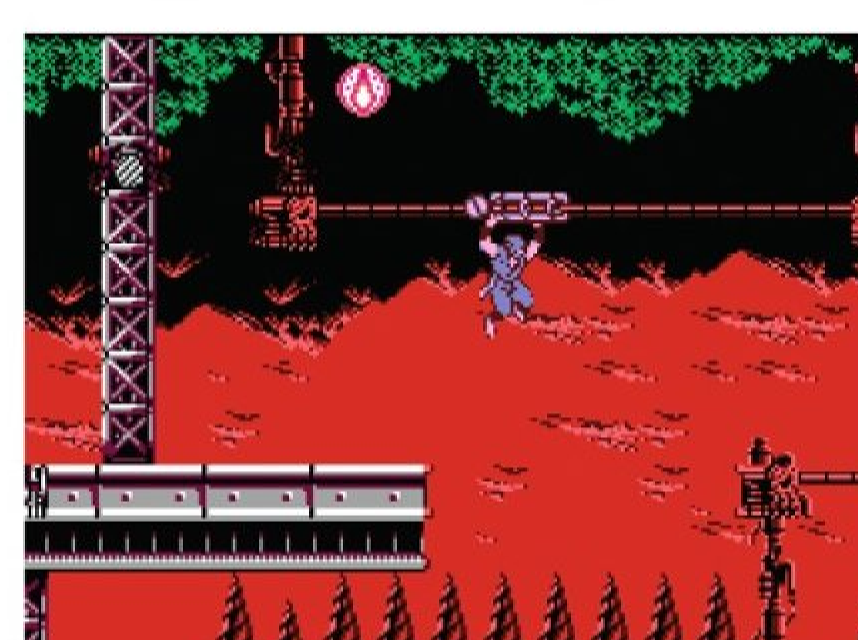


With director Hideo Yoshizawa now working as producer on the series, most of the design, story and graphical decisions for the third game fell to Masato Kato, who had previously worked as an artist and scenario writer for the series. Likely a result of the change, *Ninja Gaiden III* feels the most disparate game in the series, making a number of changes to the classic formula. The supernatural plotlines in the first two instalments now give way to a story surrounding biological testing and genetic science, while the demonic enemies are replaced with robots and machinery.

The third game opens with a shock intro for fans, which shows Irene murdered by Ryu. Of course, it's quickly revealed that the perpetrator wasn't our hero but actually someone pretending to be him. Therefore, with Ryu looking to clear his name and avenge Irene's death, the third and final episode sees him embarking on a bit of a murder investigation. This being *Ninja Gaiden*, of course it doesn't take long before things start to spiral into the realm of absurdity. By the last few acts Ryu learns that Irene's shadowy superior is behind some strange biological experiments that are being powered by an interdimensional rift and connected to a mysterious warship to which the title of the game refers.

The third game makes a number of visual and design changes too. Featuring some lovely parallax scrolling, it's without doubt the best-looking game in the series. The most notable change to occur in its design includes the switching of the previous games' subtle isometric viewpoint to a conventional 2D playing field, though this doesn't really affect how the game plays. But by far the best aspect of this game is that the frustrating enemy respawning is finally curbed. However, don't be under the illusion that this makes the game any easier; the levels in *Ninja Gaiden III* are some of the most punishing in the series. Ryu also lost his handy Phantom Shadow technique, and unlimited continues were dropped too, with players instead given just five of them with which to finish the game. And with stages full of traps, dangers, deteriorating bridges, moving platforms and spikes, not to mention scores of twitchy enemies, the final instalment of the series was certainly no pushover, and the more difficult Western version is considered to be the most challenging game in the trilogy.

The reasoning behind this has to do with policy at Tecmo at the time, which ordered the developers to make the game more challenging for Western audiences. The team, therefore, made a number of tweaks to the US version to increase its difficulty: Ryu took more damage from enemies, a handy password system was omitted from the game, and death resulted in Ryu getting reset to the beginning of the stage. The result for Western fans was a frustratingly difficult close to the trilogy.



» [NES] Ryu's ability to hang from scenery objects debuted in *Ninja Gaiden III*.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come







INFO

- **» Featured System:** PlayStation 2
- **» Year Released:** 2002
- **» Publisher:** Koei/THQ
- **» Developer:** iNiS
- **» Key People:** Mitsuru Nakamura, Sadayoshi Okamoto, Yosuke Sato (producers), Keiichi Yano (design/programming)

GO DEEPER

- **» The *Gitaroo Man* team started with eight people and then grew to 25 developers by the time it was released.**
- **» iNiS approves of the PSP port of the game, calling the console more tactile for the *Gitaroo Man* experience.**

12. GITAROO MAN

Before the age of guitar peripherals and downloadable content, Gitaroo Man made cult status in the rhythm-action genre with its highly stylised manga visuals and stirring soundtrack

THE BACKGROUND

Gitaroo Man was developer iNiS's first ever product – and the concept, surprisingly, was inspired by a rather obscure Eighties movie. Speaking to CrispyGamer, iNiS co-founder Keiichi Yano explained where the idea of a guitar-duelling game emerged from.

"As music games came out they were mostly about the rhythm. I like the rhythm, but as a student of jazz, I was always more fond of the melody… So I always wanted to do a music game that had something to do with the melody, and that you were playing with the melody." Yano had seen the 1986 Walter Hill movie *Crossroads*, which featured Ralph Macchio playing a character and facing off against the devil in a guitar duel of sorts, triumphing because the character stuck to his guns of traditional guitar playing. Basically, nobody watched it.

Yano then wondered about the idea of doing a game where the characters are shooting beams of light from their guitars, in a kind of makeshift duel. With highly detailed character and setting designs from artist 326 and music from producers COIL, iNiS went about developing a rhythm-action game that would confound expectations of what the genre was about, in the spirit of Q Entertainment's *Rez* and NanaOnSha's *Vib Ribbon*. Thanks to the reputation of these games, *Gitaroo Man* got a Western release through publisher THQ, at a time when more diverse PlayStation games were reaching these shores.

THE GAME

Sadly, *Gitaroo Man* was lost in the shuffle due to a brief print run, but critics picked up on this unique title and championed it, leading to it becoming a cult hit. The game's hero is a good-hearted loser kid called U-1, who, thanks to his wisecracking dog (obviously) transforms into Gitaroo Man, a guitar-playing warrior who has to save an intergalactic race of Gitaroo people from the villainous Zowie. The fact the story makes no sense is probably intentional, with cut-scenes even having a humorously bad English overdub that recalls the *Speed Racer* cartoons.

Things of note











…Lives Again

Gitaroo Man's PSP port is visually pared down, but a great match for the style of handheld – if you're prepared to sacrifice your thumbs to the PSP nub.

Beat Police

iNiS is also responsible for the *Ouendan* and *Elite Beat Agents* games on the DS, which share *Gitaroo Man*'s art style if not its sense of humour.

Rare No More

Gitaroo Man was hard to get hold of during the late part of the last decade, going for upwards of £30. However, it was given another print run and is now easily available.

The Pioneer Puppy

Games like *Gitaroo Man* made it to the UK thanks to the enormous success of *PaRappa The Rapper* on the PSone, which popularised previously niche music games.

Gitaroo's Greatest Hits

The soundtrack for *Gitaroo Man* can be found for about £15. Careful not to get it mixed up with the *GM* Japanese audiobook, however, which isn't the same thing.



» [PS2] The humour of the game might not gel with everyone. The music has the capacity to hook anyone's attention, however.



» [PS2] At one point, Gitaroo Man even turns into a space robot, and runs away from his opponent in the background.



What the press thought

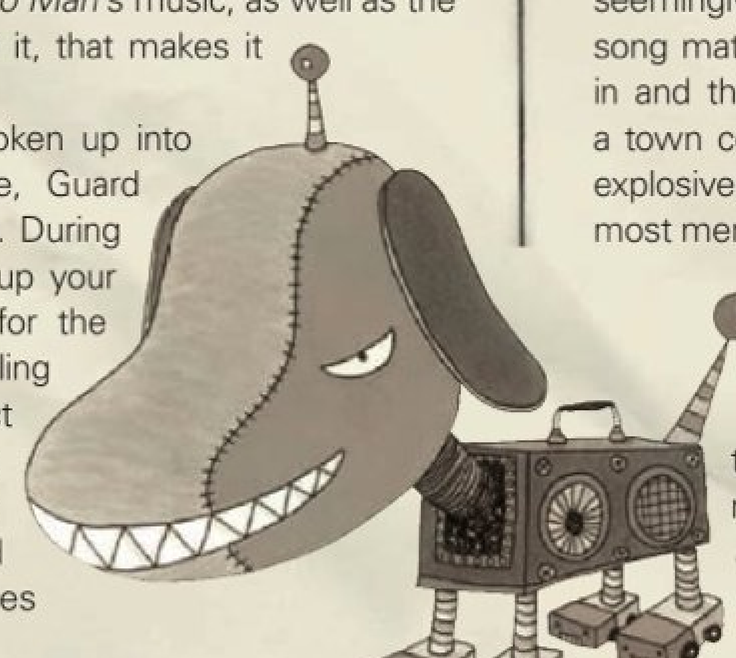


Play
Score: 80%
"With some fairly catchy tunes (offering up a mix of various different genres) this is a good 'un."

Gamespot
Score: 8.7
"Arguably the most original and inventive rhythm game since the advent of *Dance Dance Revolution* or the original *Parappa The Rapper*, and it's easily one of the best rhythm games for the PlayStation 2."

The real star, of course, is the music. *Gitaroo Man* is one of the stranger games that made it to these shores during the PS2's heyday, and the tracks that form the crux of the game reflect that. The wonderfully diverse range of melodies in the game – everything from hip-hop to jazz to rock (obviously) – means that the hour or so that it takes to actually beat the story is an irrelevant statistic. Any rhythm game that chooses not to pander to the crowd and have its own distinctive soundtrack runs the risk of being ignored by a wider audience; however, it's the creativity within *Gitaroo Man*'s music, as well as the way you interact with it, that makes it so timeless.

Most fights are broken up into three stages: Charge, Guard and the Attack phase. During the first, you charge up your health bar, readying for the enemy attack, by pulling the stick in the correct direction and pressing the O button in time with it. The second is essentially a series of QTE button presses where you dodge enemy attacks, while the third sees you going on the offensive to beat the enemy, with missed button presses damaging your health bar. Each stage feels grand, like a rock concert that always culminates in a huge finish; whereas modern rhythm-action games put the emphasis on point-scoring, the fact that your goal was to win the fight with beat-'em-up-style health bars at the top of the screen mean that the stakes of *Gitaroo Man* are wholly different.



Best of all, though, despite *Gitaroo Man*'s seemingly random direction on the surface, every song matches the style of fight you're participating in and the look of each level. An alien invasion in a town centre early on is played to the tune of an explosively paced J-pop dance ditty, and, perhaps most memorable of all, U-1 plays an acoustic version of the game's flagship tune, 'Legendary Theme' to his wannabe girlfriend, Kirah, under a tree in the setting sun. It's truly a beautiful moment that entirely breaks up the pace of the game. There's a piece of music for everyone to enjoy in *Gitaroo Man*, and that's what the game is most effective at to this day: celebrating the love of music and letting you interact with it in the most engaging fashion possible.

Why it's a future classic

The low sales of *Gitaroo Man* hide how accessible it really is. Yes, the story is completely bonkers, with guitar-throwing dogs and an embarrassed small boy who masquerades as a rock superhero, yet the comfortable simplicity of the gameplay and variation in its presentation results in an inimitable musical experience. The game also stands out because it was clearly imbued with the personality of its creators. Each character and environmental design feels like it was pored over for weeks, and unusually for a game in this genre, it feels quite cinematic, no doubt a result of the association with the movie *Crossroads*. Perhaps as a result of the precedent set by NanaOnSha, the level of visual detail is supremely high for the often visually low-fi rhythm genre.

Long after the onslaught of popular rhythm-action games are forgotten and the controllers collect dust in the loft, when U-1 steps up and wins round the crowd with the rock version of 'Legendary Theme', you'll be reminded of why *Gitaroo Man* represents a previously niche genre hitting its artistic peak.

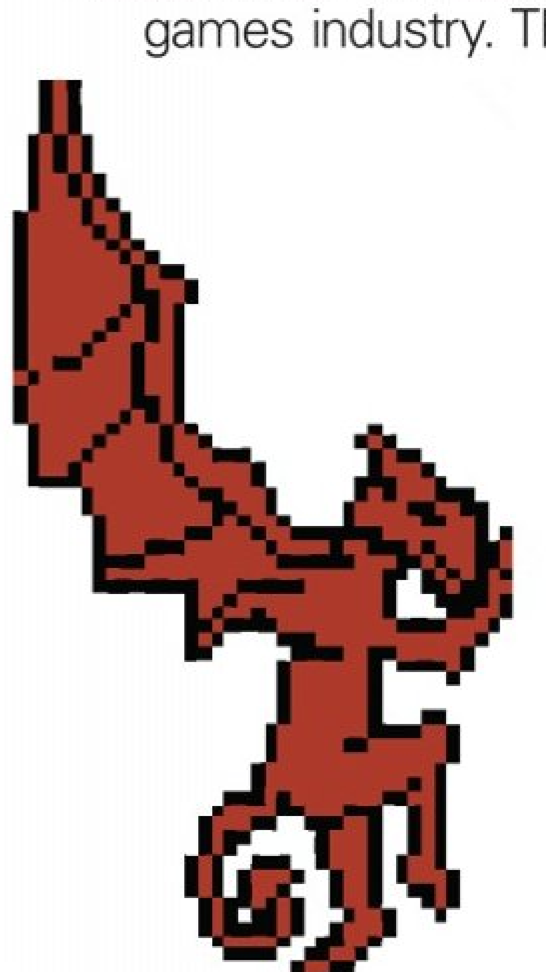


In the chair with...

STEVE TURNER

After starting off as a coder for the ZX80 and Dragon 32, Steve formed Graftgold and teamed up with Andrew Braybrook, his friend and former band mate. Graftgold went on to create some excellent coin-op conversions, before eventually leaving the industry. Darran Jones finds out what happened

INITIALLY WORKING AS a freelancer for publishers such as Hewson, Steve formed Gratfold and later joined forces with *Uridium* and *Paradroid* coder Andrew Braybrook to great effect. Graftgold quickly built a reputation for its excellent arcade conversions that included *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, but began to struggle as the 8-bit systems gave way to the more powerful 16-bit machines. Despite turning out some cracking games, including *Fire & Ice*, Graftgold eventually closed down and both Steve and Andrew left the games industry. They have not returned since.



RETRO GAMER: What did you want to do as a career when you were still at school?

STEVE TURNER: When I was young I wanted to be a scientist, then later a programmer. By the time I was in the sixth form I was playing in a local band and wanted to be a rock guitarist. I went to a teacher's training college in London hoping to get into the London rock scene but decided to leave after the first term.

RG: When did you discover videogames and which ones left a big impression on you?

ST: I started getting into videogames when I lived near Southend seafront. There were many arcades there with all the latest games. Later I used to play the same game in the local pub every lunch hour. It was a simple game where a racing car went one way round a track with four lanes, and cars came in the opposite direction. I played with some workmates and we realised that we could beat the game if we learnt a pattern for each level. After a few weeks playing we cracked every level and the game just restarted. When the score reached 99,999 it just went back to zero. After that we didn't play it any more. The machine was replaced by a *Space Invaders* machine.

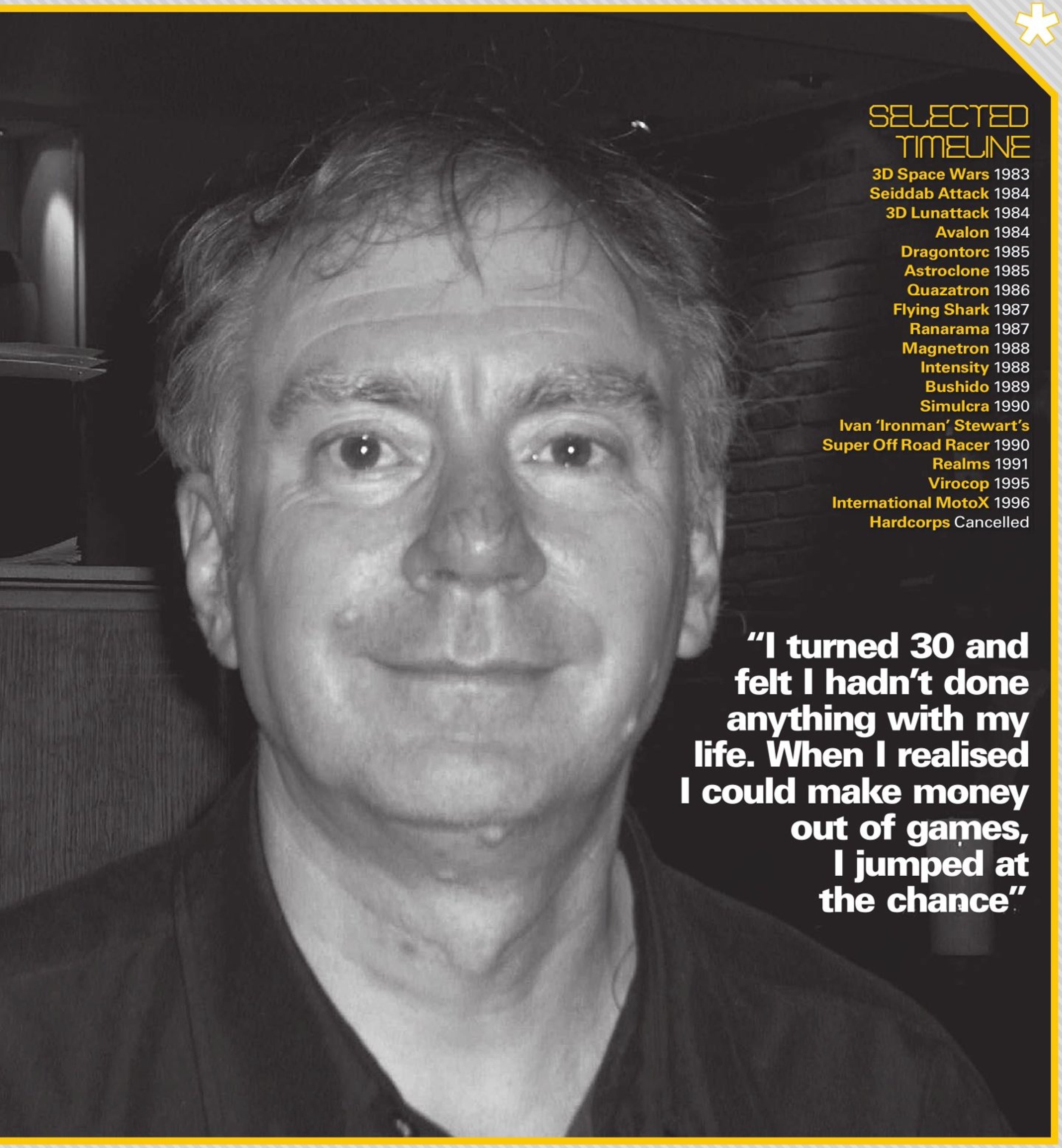
I liked the addictiveness of these simple games and tried to work out what made them so playable. For example, when there were just a few Space Invaders left the frame rate increased, maybe by accident, but this put extra pressure on the player towards the end of a level. How many games get the balance wrong and as the level is cleared it just gets easier? *Asteroids* was also a favourite. I was no good at these games; Andrew was the expert and would play for ages on the same game. When *Battlezone* came out that became our favourite. You really needed tactics to beat it.

RG: When did you get your first home computer and what was it?

ST: I bought a ZX80 kit when they first came out and was amazed at how small it actually was. It was pure sci-fi. I was a bit disappointed that assembling it was so easy, as it did not give any insight as to how it worked. I became really interested in learning how the computer worked. I got many books on microchips and Z80 from the library and started to disassemble the operating system by hand. I worked out how they were getting characters on the screen without using a character generator chip. They used the CPU RAM refresh cycle. It was really clever but the machine's downfall, as it used the CPU as well so you could not run code and display graphics. You could run code while the raster was off the screen if you timed the code to be exactly the correct number of machine cycles. That was really hard, as most code has many paths and each one had to be exactly the same length.

RG: When did you start coding and how did you teach yourself?

ST: I learnt ALGOL 60 when I was about 15 in a school computer club; it was an easy language to learn and well suited to mathematics. Later I learnt COBOL on a government training course when I was unemployed in the Seventies. It was a good move and led to a programming job in the Civil Service. There I taught myself ICL Assembler. I also had an ICL Assembler training course



SELECTED TIMELINE

3D Space Wars 1983
Seiddab Attack 1984
3D Lunattack 1984
Avalon 1984
Dragontorc 1985
Astroclone 1985
Quazatron 1986
Flying Shark 1987
Ranarama 1987
Magnetron 1988
Intensity 1988
Bushido 1989
Simulcra 1990
Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's Super Off Road Racer 1990
Realms 1991
Virocop 1995
International MotoX 1996
Hardcorps Cancelled

"I turned 30 and felt I hadn't done anything with my life. When I realised I could make money out of games, I jumped at the chance"

in my next job. After that the ZX80 was really easy. Most assembly languages are very similar and it's just a question of learning what registers they use and learning the mnemonic instructions. In most languages you use a handful of instructions for most code. The difficult bit is building big programs. The design experience I had in COBOL was a great help. I was taught how to break down a problem into little manageable chunks.

RG: How did you meet up with Andrew Braybrook?

ST: I was introduced to Andrew by a work colleague. He played in the same band as Andrew and later I joined as lead guitarist. Andrew used to write computer games to be played on terminals connected to a mainframe. Our mutual friend arranged for Andrew to supply a program on punched cards so we could try it on our work computer, but it was incompatible. One of his games was a forerunner to *Doom*. It was called *Assassin* and was a multiplayer creep-around-a-map-and-shoot-each-other game. The top-down map was built out of ASCII characters. The novel feature later used in *Paradroid* was that you only saw people if they were in your line of sight. We quickly became good friends with very similar interests. We would often play computer games at his house after a session at the pub. We would talk about games techniques and how to animate graphics. When he saw my first game he programmed bits of it on the Dragon 32 to show what he could do, and when I gave up work he was very keen to join me.

RG: You mention the band you were in. What was it called and were you any good?

ST: It was called No Class. We reformed after many years and got quite good until the singer and drummer left. At that time we were just doing rock covers.

RG: Unlike a lot of your peers you actually started off as a commercial programmer. Why the move to games?

ST: I had just turned 30 and felt I hadn't done anything with my life and could see myself in another 30 years working at the same company. When I realised I could make money out of games I jumped at the chance. I wrote my first game while still working and saved like mad. When the first royalty cheque came in I handed in my notice.

RG: So do you think being a commercial programmer gave you any advantages over your peers?

ST: I learnt how to design and program large systems broken down

* FIVE TO PLAY

RANARAMA



GAUNTLET WAS A massive success for Atari, and before long a great many developers were trying to emulate its success. *Ranarama* was Steve's take on the popular coin-op, but like many of his games, it was refreshingly different from the norm. For starters, you could only see the contents of a room you were in, meaning much of the screen was shrouded in darkness. Changed into a lowly frog, you have to negotiate the huge levels and uncover the 96 evil wizards that are spread across eight huge levels. Once a wizard has been located, you're transported to a mini-game where you have to rearrange the letters of the title as quickly as possible. Defeated wizards drop runes that offer limited magical abilities, while there are four different glyphs dotted around each level, which offer powers that range from the ability to see previous rooms you have entered to unleashing a devastating smart bomb. An excellent clone that drastically improves on *Gauntlet*'s core gameplay.

IVAN 'IRONMAN' STEWART'S SUPER OFF ROAD RACER



GRAFTGOLD DELIVERED SOME truly astonishing coin-op ports, particularly when you consider the hardware they were coded to run on, and this excellent racer was no exception. Think of a bumpy version of *Super Sprint*, with deep pools of water, devilish ramps and speedy little trucks and you'll soon start to see the appeal. *Off Road Racer* appeared on numerous systems, but Steve coded several versions, including the Spectrum and Amiga, and a damn fine job he did too. The fast and furious gameplay is all present and correct; it boasts three-player action, and the slick animation captures all the atmosphere of the original arcade game.

RAINBOW ISLANDS



THE SEQUEL TO *Bubble Bobble* was arguably one of Graftgold's finest moments. Virtually every port it did was brilliant, regardless of whether it was on the Amstrad CPC or the Atari ST. Interestingly, Steve didn't actually code *Rainbow Islands*, but he's nevertheless deeply linked to the game. Being a keen musician, Steve would often code music for a great many of Graftgold's games, particularly on the C64, and *Rainbow Islands* was one such example. His catchy rendition of the bouncy theme tune is superb and perfectly matches Braybrook's excellently designed sprites. It has a few missing worlds, but *Rainbow Islands* is a superb arcade conversion.

AVALON



AFTER CUTTING HIS teeth on simple shooters such as *3D Space Wars* and *3D Seiddab Attack*, Steve turned out this impressive piece of software. Sharing elements with Ultimate's *Atic Atac* and spread across eight progressively tougher levels, *Avalon* was greatly praised at the time due to its cutting-edge visuals, deep gameplay and innovative control system. Spells are featured in a scrolling window and you simply scroll through them to select the ones you want to use. Some can even be combined, which adds further to *Avalon*'s sophistication. It was followed a year later by an equally acclaimed sequel called *Dragontorc*.

QUAZATRON



PARADROID PROVED TO be a huge success for Steve's partner Andrew Braybrook, and it's regarded as one of the Commodore 64's best games. *Quazatron* features a lift sequence and grapple system that are similar to *Paradroid*'s, but changes the dynamics by utilising an isometric setting. You control a droid called Klepto, who's been given the task of clearing Quartech of its alien droids. In its simplest form, *Quazatron* is an enjoyable shoot-'em-up, but the *Paradroid* grappling grants it a great level of depth. The end result is a clever, gorgeous game, full of beautifully detailed sprites and exciting battles and a worthy successor to Braybrook's superb C64 game.

into smaller components. Also I was taught structured programming. Both Andrew and I used that a lot to design our routines and to explain things to each other. It was better than flowcharting, as structured charting leads to structured programs without tons of GOTOs all over the place. This makes the code testable because it has fewer paths through it. It also taught us the disciplines of testing each part of the code. Andrew wrote a little piece of code we called ABMON that ran while the code was working and allowed you to look at or change any of the variables. That meant you could tune a game while playing it.

RG: What was your early working relationship with Andrew like before you started Graftgold? Did you have a specific system in place?

ST: Andrew was my employee but also a close friend. We worked 9 to 5 in those days with an hour for lunch. Sometimes he would work later but I had a two-year-old son waiting for me to 'come home' from work. We worked in my dining room, which just had room along one wall for two desks and comfy manager-style leather chairs.

RG: Why did you move away from the Dragon 32 to systems like the Spectrum and C64?

ST: When the company that made the Dragon went bust the market ceased overnight. This was as much the fault of retailers. They wanted to sell off old stock so wouldn't accept new titles. Just because a machine goes out of production doesn't mean there is no one to buy games. People want the latest games rather than old titles. We had just released three titles and they only sold a few hundred through mail order; it was a disaster. We only got about 70p a game, so that wasn't going to pay the wages.

RG: How did your relationship with Hewson come about?

ST: I answered an ad that said 'games wanted'. I sent my first game to three publishers and two offered me a contract. I went to see them and chose Andrew Hewson, who seemed to have a better company. He manufactured his own cassette tapes, which kept costs down.

RG: Can you remember what you received payment-wise for your first Hewson game, and how did it sell?

ST: My first game sold about 32,000 copies at a royalty of something like 70p a copy. That was a lot of money for six weeks part-time work. If I was able to repeat that I would be a millionaire. Each game took longer to write and many didn't sell as well, so you could say it was downhill ever since!

» Andrew Braybrook was Steve's development partner throughout their time in the industry.



> "My first game sold 32,000 copies at 70p a copy. If I could repeat that I'd be a millionaire"

RG: Do you think the fact that you and Andrew were proficient with different computers helped in the early days?

ST: Not really. It was more the similarities such as the background of professional programming that helped us. We used to write routines in each other's games so pretty much knew each language. The 6809 assembler language on the Dragon 32 was perhaps the best language, and in some ways very like the 68000 we later learnt for the Amiga and Atari ST. We had very different approaches to game design, though, which did help. We were always bouncing ideas off each other. Andrew was very much into new control modes and would like to quickly get a character moving around so he could experiment with the control. He would design graphics and fonts before the game. I used to design a game, get it working, then put the pretty bits in.

RG: What did your family think about you moving into the videogame field? Did they take your career change seriously?

ST: I think most of them didn't think it would last long, but they knew I was sensible and had saved up enough to keep going for a year. My wife was very supportive and quite liked having me at home. She would make tea for us and sometimes key data in. My son was only two and had to learn that 9 to 5 except for a lunch hour I was 'at work'. He had no trouble with this.

RG: What was your relationship with Hewson like?

ST: I liked Andrew and Gordon Hewson very much. Gordon left soon after we started working together. Hewson really got it right with his relationships with his developers. He let us basically do what we wanted but fed us market comments and made constructive comments. He had a good relationship with magazines, which really paid off. He would always think of an angle for a product launch. The press used to enjoy them and it was fun having the chance to show the games personally.

RG: Were there any other publishers you considered?

ST: I very nearly signed with Silversoft, who were one of the first publishers to get product into the big stores.

RG: After your initial success with Hewson, were there offers from other publishers? If there were, why did you decide to stay?

ST: We did occasionally see other publishers. This was later on when we realised it was important to get published in other territories that were opening up with the new machines. Hewson started getting interested in the budget market and we couldn't see how we could make enough money out of that unless we only spent a couple of months on each game, which meant we wouldn't be able to push the edge.

RG: Why did you eventually decide to leave Hewson?

ST: We found out he was going bust and trying to sell our current games for cash. This would mean substantially less royalties, as we would only get a percentage of the cash deal rather than the wholesale price. If we had been approached properly about the situation I trusted him so much that perhaps we could have worked something out. We also knew the in-house programmers at Hewson and they confirmed the situation and asked us for a job. Hewson was imploding and his staff abandoning him. It was like every man for himself. We just didn't know what to think. We had a phone call from his ex marketing manager who had moved to Telecomsoft and asked if we could meet. Telecomsoft offered to publish our current games and fund us so we could employ Dominic Robinson and John Cummings from Hewson. The press sided with Hewson over this and slated our games when they came out. We felt it was us that had been betrayed, as Hewson had not told us what was happening. We funded our games entirely ourselves so were in a vulnerable position at the final stages of two games. We had no contract with Hewson so he was not obliged to do anything. Just about all the company's money was tied up in those games, so I didn't see



we had any choice at the time but to leave him.

RG: Your Hewson games were famed for their originality. Where did the ideas for games like *Paradroid* and *Uridium* originate?

ST: After *Gribbly's Day Out* Andrew was working on his scrolling engine so it could run at half the frame rate. I gave him a brief to do a cute robot game. I liked the little robot in *The Black Hole* and thought a timid robot would make a good character for a game. I eventually used that idea in *Quazatron*. Andrew had a think about it and next day came back with a scrap of paper, which outlined *Paradroid*. It said something like cute and high-tech don't go together and had the idea of displaying the dreadnoughts as high-tech computer maps. The game grew as he programmed it; that is how he worked. The inspiration for the sub-game came from an idea I had. I was playing around with a freebie I got with a new Spectrum. It was a digital circuit designer with logic gates. I thought you could do a kind of puzzle game where you had to unlock the circuit by switching the gates to get the correct output. He turned this into a shooting game, which was a touch of genius.

Immediately after *Paradroid* was finished, Andrew went back to his scroll routine. He put in some optimisations, limiting the scroll to horizontal so he could scroll at full frame rate. That is the secret for a really fluid game. I only know a few games that have managed that on the Spectrum, two by Graftgold staff. The dreadnought graphics were an extension of the effect Andrew had used for the *Paradroid* walls. Andrew was playing a game down the pub, which was a diagonal scrolling shooter where a fighter attacked a huge spaceship. I think that was the inspiration. Andrew wanted to get the true arcade feel in a game and knew full frame rate was the answer. The sub-game was my idea and it was similar to the double or nothing that was on a slot machine down the pub. I did the music, but I never got round to doing *Paradroid* as I was so busy. That's why Andrew made his own 'music' with my music engine that sounded like robot chatter. I thought it was brilliant and set the mood for the game, so we kept it.

RG: How did you find the transition from 8-bit to 16-bit?

ST: Andrew was just dying to work on the Amiga. I bought an Amiga for him to play with, but we had to continue writing 8-bit games, as that was what Hewson wanted. When we signed with BT we were contracted to produce a 16-bit product, *Simulcra*, and also four 8-bit titles. So we had to keep producing 8-bit titles for a while. The biggest leap was the graphics. We had always drawn our own but knew with the colour resolution on the 16-bits we would need at least one full-time graphic artist proficient in an art package. John Cumming initially took that role. We knew it would mean more than one person working on a game. We also knew that the extra expense needed to develop a game would mean we needed more income. That meant either more sales or a bigger royalty. Our solution was to develop games that would sell on both Amiga and Atari ST. We started work on a games system that would run on both machines. Dominic Robinson did this work. The downside of all this was that we had to be funded from publishers to afford this. We never used to take advances as we felt it gave us more control over the product. Things had changed, though. The larger investment meant you needed to get a publisher to commit to the product by giving an advance.

> "Give me a bit of code rather than the stress of wondering if you can pay the wages"

RG: When did you decide to create Graftgold?

ST: At first I started a business called ST Software. When *Avalon* started making big money I realised I would have a huge tax bill. This could not be offset against years when I did not make money so did not suit developing games over a long period. It was better to start a limited company that paid corporation tax. That meant the company could hold on to more royalties and use them to pay our wages.

RG: What were the biggest hurdles you faced while initially setting the company up?

ST: There is a lot of red tape working for yourself. I can remember sending



» [Spectrum] *Avalon* was billed as a '3D Adventure Movie' on its original packaging.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Astroclone was released on the Spectrum in **1985**. It's the only game Steve coded on the machine with Andrew Braybrook

Steve wrote a series of **7** articles about programming for *ZX Computing*, called 'The Professional Touch'

Steve was extremely prolific on the Spectrum, going on to create **11** games for the system

Quazatron has received **280** votes on World Of Spectrum

Avalon only has **1** sequel, *Dragontorc*, which scored **92%** in *Crash* magazine

Ranarama appeared on **3** compilations, including *10 Great Games 3*, *Four Smash Hits* and *Heatwave*

3D Space Wars was Steve's first published Spectrum game. It was released in **1983** and scored **68%** in *Crash*

A total of **19** different programmers worked on Graftgold games

Although Graftgold did create a CD**32** version of *Fire & Ice*, it was never actually published

off for an information pack, as there was a BBC programme about being self-employed. I had to learn how to calculate National Insurance and income tax and how to keep accounts and work out the VAT. That side of it took quite a while. Luckily I knew all about accounts from my previous job working with accounts software. Perhaps the biggest hurdle, though, is trying to find the money and time before you start. I knew I couldn't give up my job unless I had saved up at least a year's income, to give me a safety net. At first we didn't need much equipment other than the home computers, cassette tape recorders, TVs and a printer that we shared. We soon got desks and big comfy leather chairs.

RG: What does the name Graftgold mean?

ST: Graftgold was an off-the-shelf company. Company formation agents register companies with random names so that they can sell you a ready-made company very fast. We could have changed the name when we activated the dormant company but couldn't think of a better name. I always took 'graft' to mean hard work, as in 'hard graft'. This is derived from a graft being a trench depth of one spade deep, presumably hard work to dig. In the US one definition is 'gained by illicit means', so you could say it meant 'money obtained by hard work' or 'money obtained by deception'!

RG: How did you go about hiring staff?

ST: When I started out I only employed people I knew. Later we used to advertise in a computer magazine. We would cut dozens of applicants down to about ten and interview them. For programmers we didn't necessarily want qualifications; just evidence that the person had experience on at least one full-sized game.

For artists I was prepared to take on complete newcomers as long as they could show a portfolio of work that showed good drawing skills and use of colour, shading, perspective, etc. Usually college projects were a waste of time; I wasn't interested in things like bits of cloth stuck on a sheet. I used to ask artists to bring at least one drawing of a face and one of a figure. Sometimes we sat them down at a graphics package and let them draw something.

RG: How did the dynamics change between Andrew and yourself?

ST: Andrew and I had only known each other for a short time when we started, but quickly became good friends. We used to play in a band, play *Dungeons & Dragons* together and see each other down the pub. Although he was an employee I treated him as an equal. The difference was I owned the company and had the worry of whether I could afford to pay the wages; he only had to worry about his games. As the years went by we gained a great deal of mutual respect for each other. I wouldn't do anything without seeing what he thought.



» Steve hard at work.

RG: What was it like running a company as opposed to simply making games?

ST: It was really hard work trying to do both! There are so many aspects to running a company. You end up being responsible for everything and if need be have to do it yourself. I have cleaned toilets, mended plumbing, installed alarms, fixed computers, dealt with tax inspectors, landlords, publishers, accountants, bank managers as well as keeping the staff happy and motivated. Everything had to be scheduled so it all worked like clockwork. We never had a great deal of spare cash so had to meet each programming milestone and get it approved by a publisher to get the advance cheque that would pay the wages. If something started falling behind I had to sort it out. Programming was a welcome relief to all this. Give me a complicated bit of code to write any day rather than the stress of wondering if you can pay the wages at the end of the month.



RG: Why did you decide to focus on arcade conversions?

ST: It started off as a favour for Telecomsoft. They were let down by a programming team and needed a Spectrum version of *Flying Shark* in just six weeks. It also was a nice little earner. It turned out well, and we enjoyed doing it, so they offered us *Rainbow Islands*.

RG: How long would the conversion process typically take?

ST: It used to take about six to nine months for a proper conversion, depending on the size of the game and the number of versions that were required.

RG: What were the biggest difficulties you had when working on conversions?

ST: The hardest bit was trying to make the game work on the 8-bit machines. The arcade hardware was very advanced, so the games had to be reduced in size and carefully programmed to make them fast enough. This was especially hard on the Spectrum due to its lack of sound and graphic hardware.

RG: Did you get sent any arcade machines as part of your conversions and did you get to keep them?

ST: We would only do an arcade conversion if we could have the arcade machine to work with. The [*Super Off Road*] machine was huge due to it having three steering wheels. We had to dismantle it to get it to our upstairs office. We used to make a video playing the game from start to finish. We had some excellent games players. David could go right through *Rainbow Islands* on one credit after

many nights playing. The only machine we got to keep was the *Rainbow Islands* machine. It was given to Andrew and he still has it at home.

RG: Which of your arcade conversions are you most proud of and why?

ST: *Rainbow Islands* was my favourite. The 16-bit versions were so accurate. Normally conversions were pale versions of the original. We set a new standard, showing how it should be done.

RG: How did the change of publisher with *Rainbow Islands* affect you?

ST: We had just about finished when Telecomsoft sold out to MicroProse. Then we heard that Taito would not let MicroProse publish the game. We had been paid and were not on a royalty deal so it did not mean we would lose money. However, after working so hard we wanted our work to be seen. The game had been reviewed and the magazines were instrumental in getting the game published.

RG: Did you approach publishers with ideas for conversions or did they always approach you?

ST: The publishers approached us when they had a licence and would ask us to put in a costing. Sometimes it would be a film licence. We started doing *Total Recall* for Mirrorsoft before they went bust.

RG: What was your plan for it?

ST: It was a run-and-jump shooter with a sideways view like *Prince Of Persia*. Gary Foreman was working on it.

RG: Can you tell us of any other cancelled games you've been involved with?

ST: That was the only cancelled licensed game that I can remember. We completed a SNES *Empire Soccer* and were working on a CD version for the PC, but Empire pulled the plug. Mega Drive *Magic Pockets* and *Fire & Ice* were both cancelled. The PC Engine version of *Paradroid* was finished but never actually released.

RG: What was it like moving over to the consoles? Did it require a different work ethic?

ST: It was fairly easy moving to the consoles until the PlayStation came along, as we already were used to working in a team for each product. The Sony development kit was very expensive; also we needed a publisher to give us a huge advance to be able to afford it. Even so we could only afford two programmer kits, which meant we could not put a big team on a PlayStation project. One big difference was that it became almost impossible to create original projects on the consoles. Projects had to be agreed with the console manufacturers and often huge pre-orders made. This pushed the risk sky high for publishers, so they mainly only wanted licensed product to ensure enough sales, or a game that was already a hit.

> “I miss the fun we had and the feeling of pride when a new product is completed”



» [Spectrum] Rearranging letters is the key to vanquishing foes in *Ranarama*.

RG: Your contracts were passed through a number of different publishers during the end of the 8-bit era and into the 16-bit. How did this affect Graftgold?

ST: We went through a period of publishers going down like ninepins. We managed to keep going but it led to delayed or diminished publication and drained our cash. We had to choose projects carefully to survive rather than do what we wanted. It was also very demoralising. We lost many key people in this period and I am sure this was a major factor.

RG: What can you tell us about *The Ottifants*? Was it going to be a series of long-running games?

ST: *Ottifants* was meant to be the next big TV cartoon series following *The Simpsons*. Sega bought the games licence and asked us to design and develop a game based on the original comic strips. They wanted a game really quickly to coincide with the expected release of the TV programme. So we used the framework of *Fire & Ice* to develop a run-and-jump game where the baby elephant character fired jelly babies out his trunk. It was very cute; our animation expert, Colin Seaman, did a superb job on the main character. However, the TV show was never shown in this country.

RG: How did your collaboration with Renegade come about?

ST: We had done a conversion of *Gods* for The Bitmap Brothers and knew them pretty well. Renegade had a couple of the Bitmap team on the board and had a different way of dealing with developers. They used a profit-sharing deal whereby development costs and publishing costs were paid then the resulting profit shared. Normally we had to fund development out of 15-20 per cent of sales income, so it was a much fairer deal for the developers.

RG: When did you start realising that Graftgold was in trouble?

ST: Graftgold had been close to the edge for a number of years. The situation was that the cost of developing each new game was growing exponentially. We badly needed a big hit to replenish our cash reserves so we could invest in new kit and new original development. Publishers increasingly wanted to see playable projects before they committed any advances. That meant most of the game programming had to be in place. That was a Catch-22 situation because we needed funding to get the code to this stage. It made us increasingly dependent on publishers, who could change their mind at any moment. When Renegade sold to Warner and Warner decided to downscale its projects, our main development, *Dragonwrath*, was cancelled. This almost finished us, but we managed to keep going with a couple of conversion deals.

RG: How did you survive?

ST: We badly needed extra funding to buy kit and were living hand to mouth. If a payment came in late we really struggled. Selling the majority of the company to Perfect seemed like the solution, but it was the final straw. We struggled on for two years but no conversion deals materialised, so we were reliant totally on advances for the one remaining original project, *Hardcorps*. Perfect successfully placed the project with a publisher, but one month our monthly transfer to pay the wages did not arrive, so this was the moment we knew we were in big trouble. We struggled on for six weeks, hoping this was just a glitch, and were forced to close down when it became obvious that no more payments were to be made.

RG: Did you ever consider creating another company after Graftgold?

ST: We talked with a couple of people about taking over the company. I had no money to create another company. I did not want to be in a situation where I would be scrimping to create another product. I knew that massive finance was required to start a project. Andrew and I had to get regular jobs to pay the bills. We talked to various people about developing for them, but at this point needed a deal whereby we got a regular wage.

RG: So what are you doing now?

ST: Andrew now heads a team that develops an insurance product. I am retired but dabble with games. I still have games that I dream of writing inside of me.

RG: And how does it compare to the Graftgold days of old?

ST: It is a great deal more relaxing. I remember the horrible feeling in my stomach every time I think of the data and wonder whether payments will arrive in time, and the working for 20 hours a day at some times to get projects back on time. I miss the fun we had and the feeling of pride when a new product is completed.

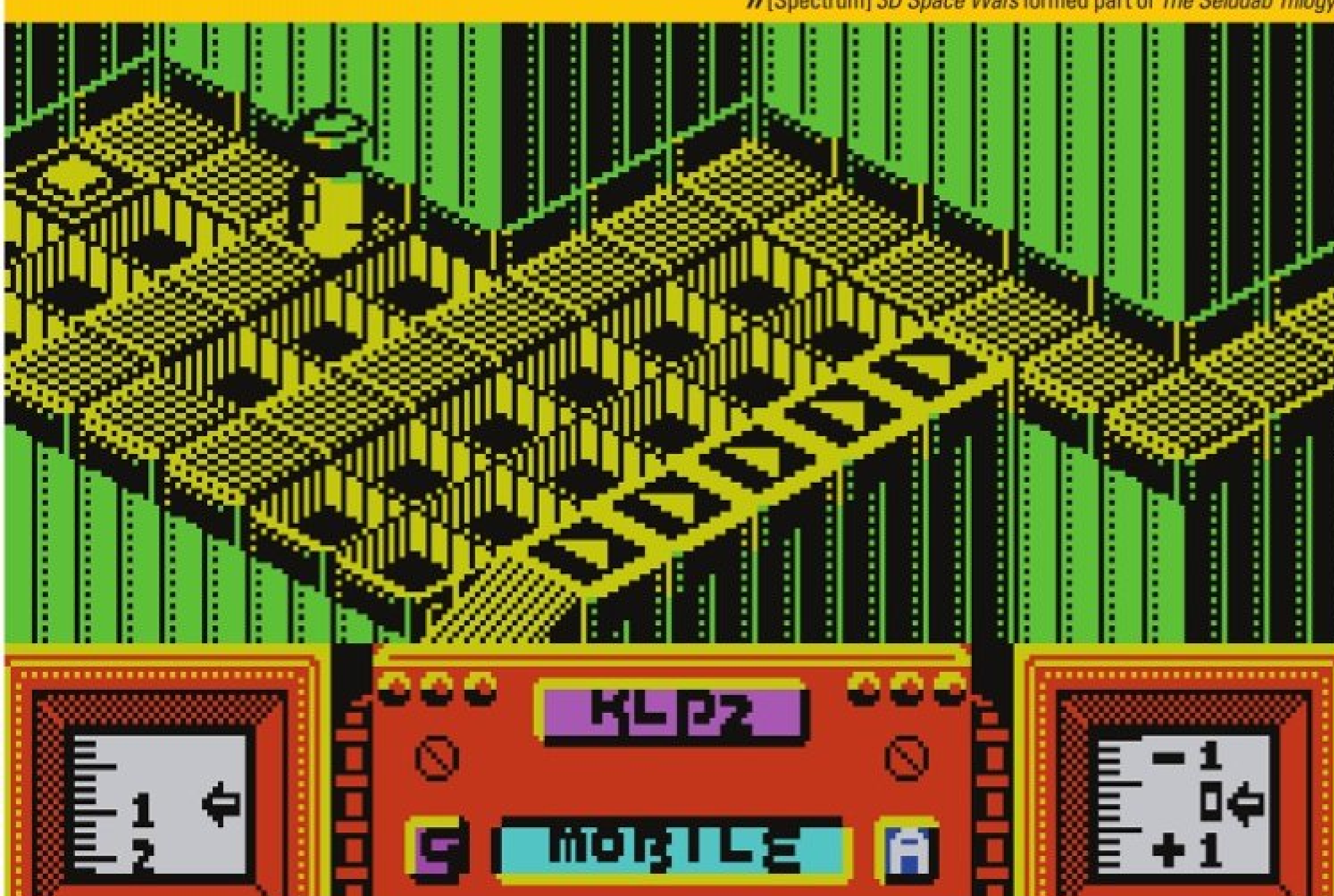


RG: Have you and Andrew considered returning to the games industry?

ST: Occasionally. And if we could do it without having to deal with publishers, it would be much more likely.



» [Spectrum] *3D Space Wars* formed part of *The Seiddab Trilogy*.



» [Spectrum] *ACE* magazine made *Magnetron* one of its top 100 Spectrum games.



» [Spectrum] *Avalon* was nominated for a Golden Joystick award in 1984.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Steve Turner has been behind some wonderful games over the years. Needless to say, plenty of readers wanted to ask him questions…

What were the complications in transferring games between Spectrum and C64?
The biggest hurdle was the fact that a game designed for the Spectrum would look technically poor on the C64, as it would not be designed to use the hardware. We had to think of ways to enhance the game to bring it up to the C64 standard.

Did you prefer keyboard or joystick controls for your games?
I used to play with both depending on the game, but in general played with a Kempston joystick. I used to hate the way joysticks used to have just one function button, so you had to think of clever ways to add functions. I hated games that used both at the same time. Then I would use the keyboard.



Do you think more companies should go back and refine their work, fixing bugs and improving features, as Graftgold did with several of its titles?
Now we have the internet for patch releases I think new patches should always be made available, fixing issues or adding to gameplay.

What happened to *Morpheus*? Did it reach completion?
It was completed and released under the Rainbird label by British Telecomsoft. Unfortunately the press sided with Hewson, thinking we were just trying to get more money.

Was *Quazatron* an indirect port of *Paradroid*, and which do you prefer?
It started off as a different game and ended up as a partial port. I preferred the original mainly because of the better scrolling. I liked the character KLP-2 better, though.

In the twilight years, would you have preferred to make original games, rather than arcade conversions, had the money been there to make it commercially viable?
Yes, we had some really good ideas, which I am sure would have sold well. For instance, an arcade adventure game starring a girl warrior who searched old ruins and temples for dragon eggs. We took that to Electronic Arts way before *Tomb Raider* was heard of!

What platform was the easiest and most fun to program on?
I think the Amiga. It was the easiest to get really good graphics and sound. The assembly language was very good. It was also supported by some top class development kits that made programming and debugging much quicker.

Was there ever going to be a sequel to *Fire & Ice*? And why didn't the Mega Drive version ever get released?
We did talk about a sequel, but Renegade sold out to Warner, who then also pulled out of the market. They would have been the most likely publisher.

Was there ever a specific A1200 version of *Empire Soccer* made?
I think there was. It was either done for a magazine cover or for an A1200 bundle rather than a standard publishing. It allowed Jose to put in animations that he had to take out of the original version due to lack of space.

Special thanks to Steve for his invaluable time

Pac-Land

PAC-MAN ESCAPES

» RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE
» NAMCO
» 1984

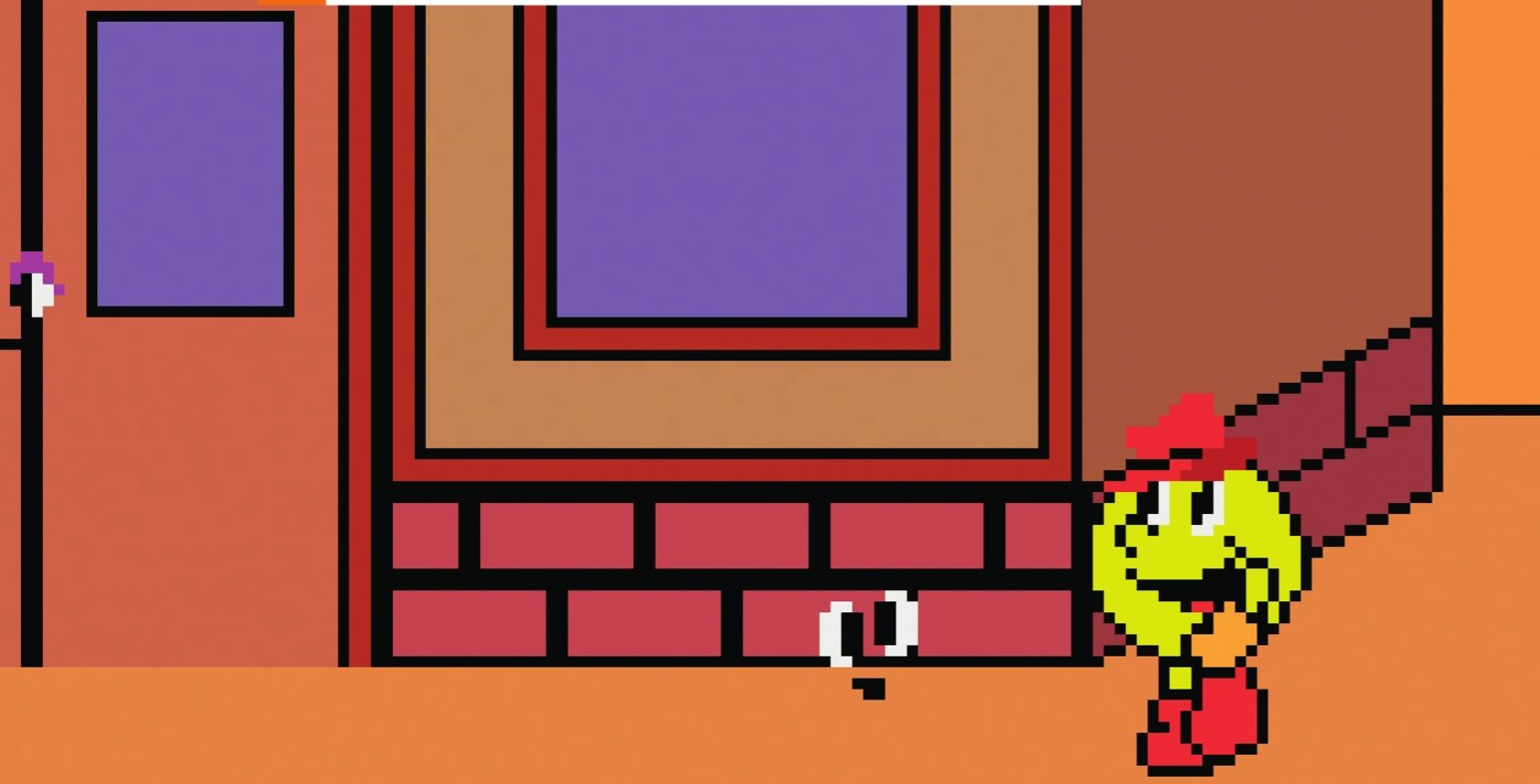
Some may find this surprising, maybe even a little shocking, but my first ever experience of *Pac-Man* was this game here. In my defence, I wasn't even alive when the original arcade game was released, so when I started to get into playing games the original *Pac-Man* was pretty much verging on retro, while arcades were something I was a few years away from discovering.

At the time I obviously had no idea Pac-Man was one of the most famous videogame characters of the time, and, thanks to *Pac-Land*, my first thoughts towards the character was that he was a bit of an odd-looking platform game hero – something that looked like a member of the Mister Men, who dressed like a newspaper journalist and went about his days walking, helping fairies and avoiding spooks. As I later discovered, of course, *Pac-Land* was a spin-off sequel based on the seminal 1980 arcade game, and was a big departure from the series' usual maze chase offerings.

Dropping the traditional dot-munching, ghost-evading gameplay, it finds Pac-Man traversing a series of side-scrolling stages, taking in colourful towns and forests, avoiding his spectral enemies and negotiating dangers with timely jumps and power-ups – including some cool boots that imbue him with the power of flight and, of course, his iconic Power Pill to turn the table on his enemies – as well as plenty of joystick waggling. Curse those bloody pool jumps!

By the late Eighties, games of this ilk had become ten-a-penny, which of course led me to initially consider it to be fun but really quite derivative. However, in 1984, the year of *Pac-Land*'s release, many highly-regarded titles of the side-scrolling platform genre, such as *Super Mario Bros.*, were a few years off release. Thus, while it might not have been as influential or important as its 1980 forebear, it's fair to say that *Pac-Land* was still doing some pretty inventive things with the license.

Sadly, being one of the earliest legitimate side-scrolling platformers to see release, *Pac-Land* hasn't aged particularly well. However, for all the reasons I've explained it's still a game that holds plenty of fond memories for me. *





RETRORATED



>> It's hard to believe that Duke Nukem Forever was first announced when the Saturn was still a viable gaming platform. We give our verdict on the long-gestating game and also spend time with Rez's spiritual sequel, Child Of Eden. Enjoy!

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D
While it's short on content, there's no denying that it's a fast and furious blaster.



STUART
Child Of Eden
It doesn't have the same allure as *Rez*, but I've still enjoyed my return to synaesthesia.



DAVID
Duke Nukem Forever
Yes, it's far from perfect, but I still enjoyed playing through Duke's long-overdue adventure.

>> DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Duke Nukem Forever

A THROWBACK YOU'LL WANT TO THROW BACK

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £44.99
- **PUBLISHER:** 2K GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** 3D REALMS, TRIPTYCH GAMES, PIRANHA GAMES, GEARBOX SOFTWARE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-8

BRIEF HISTORY

» After debuting in two popular side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups for the PC, *Duke Nukem* shot to fame in 1996 when he appeared in the huge FPS smash *Duke Nukem 3D*. A series of console and PC spin-off games followed while 3D Realms began development on a true sequel. 15 years later, and *Duke Nukem Forever* is finally here.

WHY NOT TRY

SOMETHING OLD
DUKE NUKEM 3D (1996)



SOMETHING NEW
BULLETSTORM (2011)



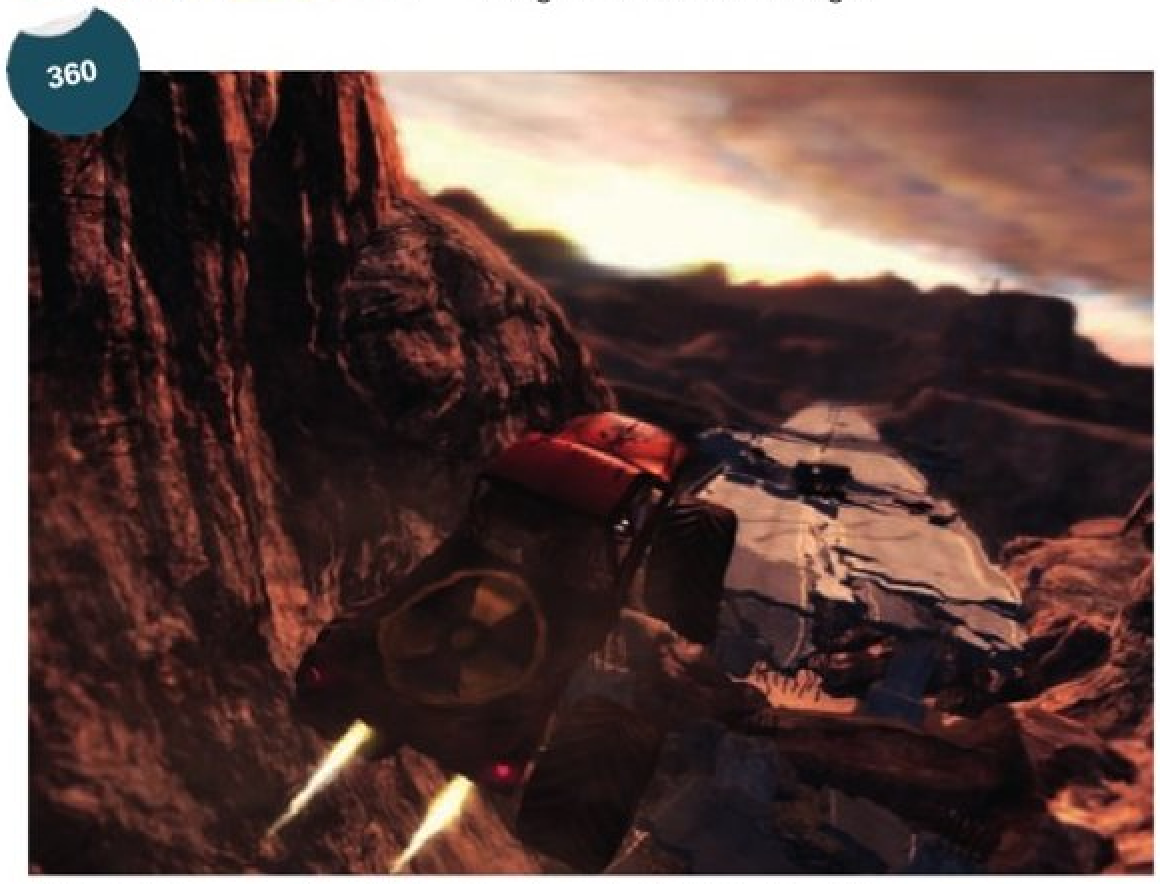


Finally free from its legendary development mire, *Duke Nukem Forever* is here and in the last few months leading up to its release has been promising us a return to the FPS games of old. But while there's no denying that *DNF* feels like a throwback, it's not in the sense we had hoped.

The issue we have is that, somewhere along *DNF*'s protracted development, 3D Realms lost sight of what it is that made the game's predecessor such a landmark shooter. Absent are the interesting and fun locales that felt more like playgrounds than battlegrounds, and gone is the consistent level of environmental interaction, the solid shooting mechanics and the sharp humour. In their place sits a clunky cluster of familiar elements, and not always good ones, from popular shooters released in the time spanning between *Duke Nukem Forever*'s announcement back in 1997 and whenever it was finally finished.

Using *Duke Nukem 3D* as a tool to best explain our gripes with this game, the levels in *DNF* feel restrictive and derivative in comparison, and the fun and interactive elements that the series is famed for feel limited to specific pockets of the game rather than being spread across the whole world. Be it a changing room where you can take a leak and fish out a stranger's dookie to throw against a wall; a games room where you can shoot some hoops, lift some weights and play pinball; or a bizarre level in which Duke must locate three random items to receive a lap dance in his own club, it all feels a bit tired, laboured and predictable, and it's never really integral to the game's overall design.

360



» [Xbox 360] Sequences that might have been innovative in 1996 feel like old hat now.





» [Xbox 360] There is plenty of fan service in *DNF*. In the opening level you get to sign Duke's famous autobiography, *Why I'm So Great*. Still doesn't make it a good game, though.

More obvious changes for the worse see the Duke blessed with the ability to miraculously self-heal and being limited to holding just two weapons at any one time, which we can bet was probably done to make him feel Master Chief-like. This wouldn't be a bad thing if these elements were actually good ideas and it didn't hurt the gameplay. Duke has now been made to feel a bit weedier to compensate for him now being semi-invincible, and as such the gameplay becomes full of cat-and-mouse gunfights that see you running into cover until Duke feels brand new again. And if you're anything like us, his annoyingly limited carrying capacity will likely also see you just clinging to your two preferred weapons for the majority of the game rather than experimenting with different combinations, à la *Duke Nukem 3D*.

This long-awaited reunion is made more awkward as a result of the game's maddening shooting and movement mechanics. Shooting feels so frustratingly fiddly and imprecise that you might as well be throwing darts, and the choppy and



» [Xbox 360] The levels in which Duke is shrunk to the size of an action figure demonstrate the most creativity.

frequently changing frame rate also allows enemies to easily get right up in your face because you simply can't hit them when they charge towards you. And while it would be remiss of us not to say that we found the aiming issue improved slightly by knocking the crosshair sensitivity down a tad in the options menu, this still doesn't solve the fact that Duke's movement feels equally as cumbersome – an issue made continually noticeable by a large number of maddening platform sections.

Our last bugbear is the absurd loading times. Death frequently results in a 30-second wait to be put back in the game. In fact, it takes so long to restart that we were beginning to think the game might be running through an elaborate pulley system of FPS engine emulators, so many has it run on throughout its development.

Despite our long list of complaints, though, there are some moments of genuine entertainment to be found in the game. And when it is daring to try something new, it does surprise you. The levels where Duke is miniaturised show some real imagination and genuine humour, with Duke riding a toy RC car around a casino being a standout moment, and the shrinking idea is used to brilliant effect in an entertaining level set in a fast food restaurant that sees Duke shrunk to action figure size, blasting miniature Pig Cops, hiding under plastic cups and using oversized kitchen appliances to get around. However, examples like this are sadly few and far between.

We weren't expecting the second coming with *Duke Nukem Forever*, and we didn't imagine it would ever live up to our expectations, but after some 15 years in the making we were certainly hoping for something far more solid, entertaining and finished than this. *DNF* isn't a terrible game; it's just terribly disappointing.

When the Duke returns to our screens, here's hoping that Gearbox sees past his blond hair, shades and planet-sized ego and realises that it wasn't Duke, and solely Duke, that made *Duke Nukem 3D* such a landmark shooter in 1996.

OPINION



Considering his derision towards Master Chief, it's surprising how much of *Duke Nukem Forever* is actually indebted to Bungie's hero. Yes, the humour is incredibly crass at times, and yes, it unravels quicker than a snagged jumper in its final chapters, but I still enjoyed my time with Duke. He's like that offensive old uncle you learn to put up with because he's family.

Darran Jones



✱GO DEEPER

The facts behind Duke Nukem Forever

>> The game was first announced in 1997, the same year that *Gran Turismo*, *Quake II* and *Diablo* were released.

>> Triptych Games is made up of several former 3D Realms employees who were determined to see *Duke Nukem Forever* finished and released following 3D Realms' closure.

>> Duke is voiced by Jon St John. The American voice actor also voiced the character of Big the Cat in the *Sonic Adventure* series.

» [Xbox 360] Almost all the enemy types are returning from the last *Duke Nukem* game.

In a nutshell

If you're a die-hard Duke fan and play this with extremely thick rose-tinted spectacles on, you might be able to look past many of its issues and glean some enjoyment from it. Ultimately, though, there's no denying that this is a disappointing and mystifying end to a very long saga.

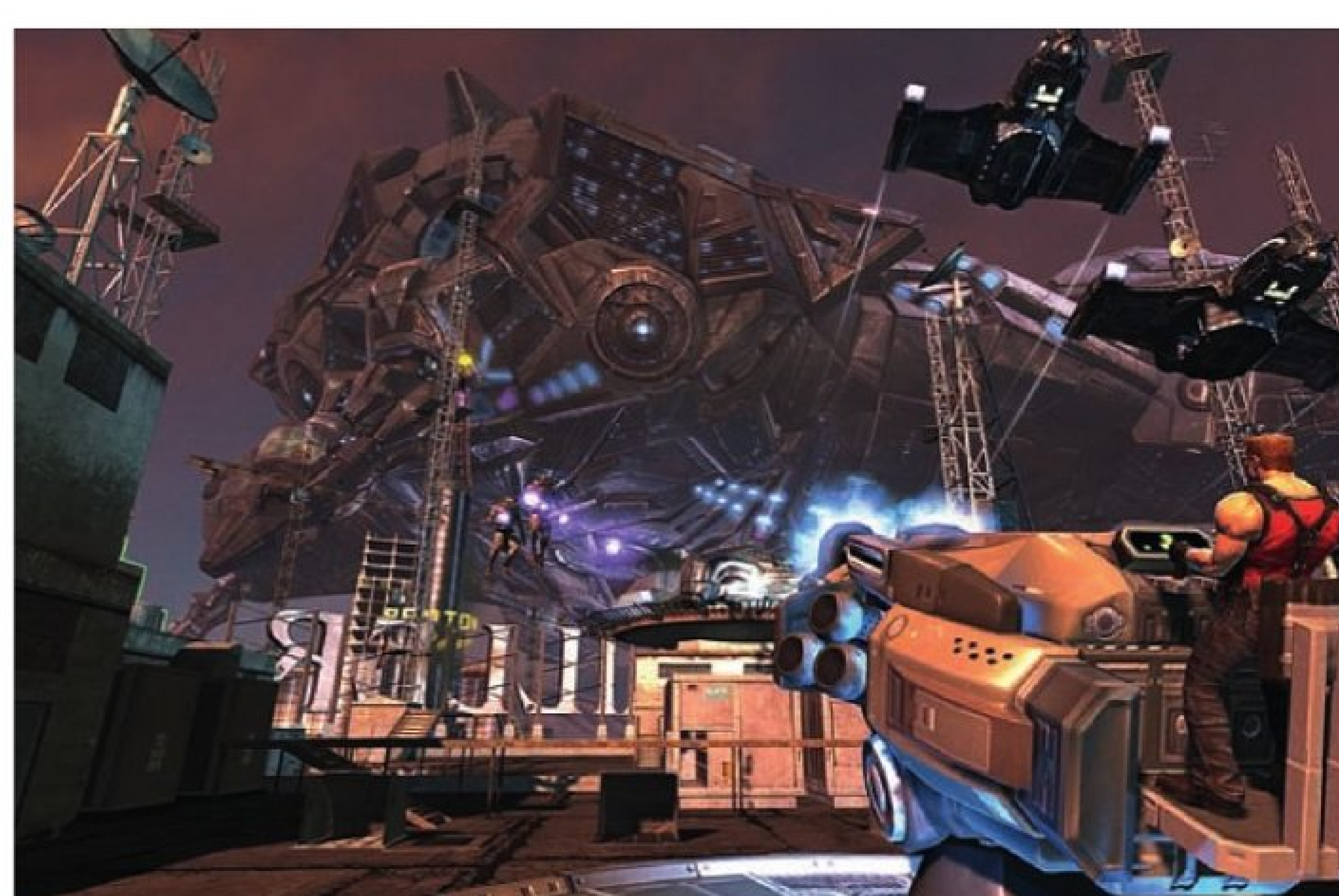
>> Score **56%**

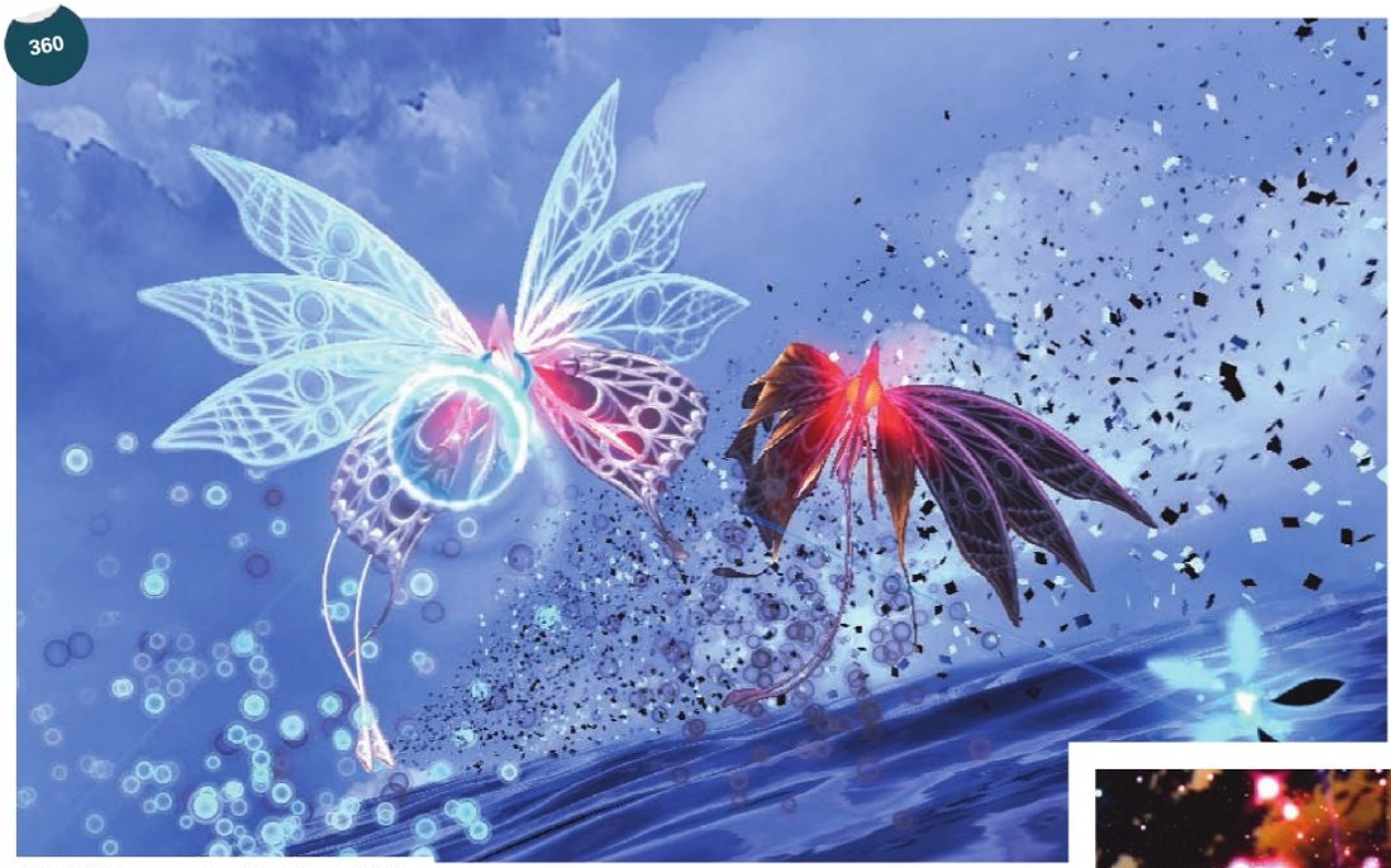


Familiarity sucks

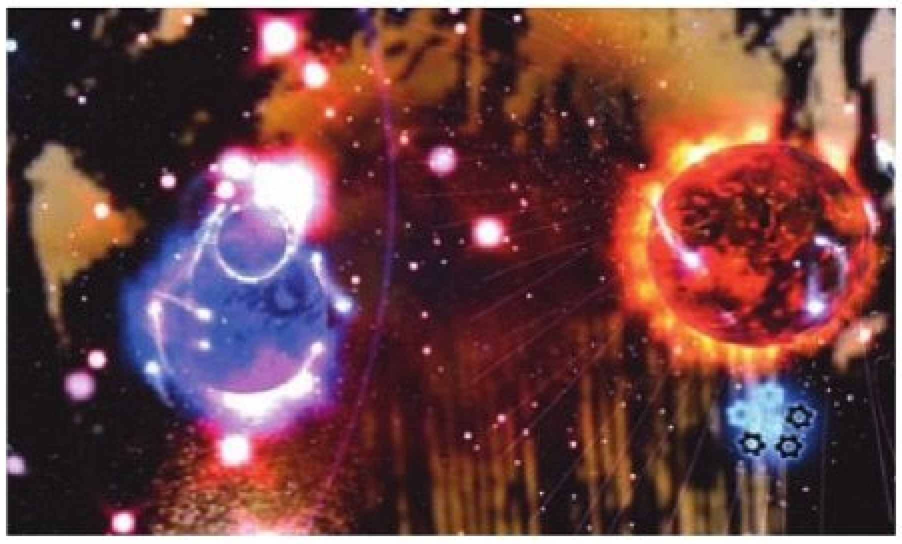
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER opens on a nice twist for fans. And if you don't want it spoiled for you then read no more. The game begins inside an American football stadium, where Duke must take to the field to bring down a giant cycloid in a clear homage to the final boss battle in *Duke Nukem 3D*. Once the alien threat is removed and the world is saved, the camera then draws backwards to reveal that this section is actually a self-referential videogame being played by Duke while he gets pleasured by two girls.







» [Xbox 360] There are some beautiful creations in *Child Of Eden*. It's almost a shame to destroy them.



IT'S TIME TO RETURN TO SYNAESTHESIA

Child Of Eden



***Child Of Eden* may utilise Kinect and be a brand new intellectual property, but make no mistake: this is *Rez 2* in all but name.**

Created by the brain behind the original *Rez*, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, *Child Of Eden* is a truly beautiful experience that features many of the great trademarks of its predecessor, but visually ups the ante with its stunning high-definition imagery.

Child Of Eden's story is superfluous, to say the least, but it requires the player to save Project Lumi, a beautiful young girl, from an incoming virus attack. This involves exploring five large archives (plus a bonus one) and cleansing them so that a human personality can be reproduced in the artificial world of *Rez*'s Eden. Fortunately, the actual gameplay is far better than the twee story.

One hand controls your lock-on reticule, which, as with *Rez*, enables you to lock onto up to eight targets at once, while the other handles the tracer, a new, high-powered stream of bullets used to take down enemy projectiles as they're thrown towards you. It's an extremely elegant system that works very well.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** Q ENTERTAINMENT
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Rez* was first released in 2001 for the PlayStation 2 and Dreamcast. Quickly earning a reputation thanks to its scintillating soundtrack and clever gameplay mechanics, it built up a deserved following over the years and was ported to Xbox Live Arcade in 2008.

Exaggerated movements very occasionally cause camera issues, and we couldn't rack up the same sort of scores we were achieving on a pad. However, it remains a great showcase of Kinect's attributes, and indeed the best game on the system, and is a surprisingly accessible entry point to what is essentially a hardcore shooter.

And *Child Of Eden*'s vaults can be extremely tough to fight through. While the initial level is something of a breeze, and aesthetically similar to *Rez* in both style and content, the difficulty level soon ramps up, especially if you're going to try and 100 per cent each stage. Initially the new unlock system grates – you're required to earn a set amount of stars and complete the previous stage to progress, meaning you need to replay them – but you soon realise that you need this extra time in order to become acclimatised to the controls and learn the complex enemy patterns.

Musically it's somewhat safer than *Rez*, lacking the variety and scope of its predecessor – possibly because all the tunes are by Genki Rockets. It eventually works its magic, but it's far subtler, and there's nothing here that tops the menacing majesty of Adam Freeland's 'Fear'. The last archive is also something of a disappointment, falling well short of *Rez*'s memorable final moments. Finally, a distinct sense of déjà vu can occur when encountering its many beautiful bosses. And yet *Child Of Eden* remains a genuinely engaging experience, even if it can't quite leave up to its illustrious predecessor.

OPINION



The controller is the best way to play *Child Of Eden*, but Kinect adds a whole new and immersive dimension to the experience. I would have liked more variety in the level and boss design – maybe it's too passionate a love letter to *Rez* – but I'm sure some fans will disagree.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

You don't need Kinect to enjoy *Child Of Eden*, but it delivers an undeniable sense of interaction and power that's missing from playing with a pad. It's no *Rez*, but it remains a challenging and captivating experience.

>> Score 85%

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Child Of Eden

>> The music is performed by the mysterious Genki Rockets. Tetsuya Mizuguchi is one of the band's known producers.

>> Lumi is the fictional girl who fronts Genki Rockets. Born on 11 September 2037, she has never visited Earth.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
REZ (DREAMCAST)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
YAR'S REVENGE (XBOX 360)



Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing

SUMO DIGITAL'S FUN RACER HITS iOS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, WII, XBOX 360, DS » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** SUMO DIGITAL » **PLAYERS:** 1-3



Has it really been over a year since Sumo's *Mario Kart* clone first burst into our dull lives? It would appear so, and the talented developer has now unleashed a rather impressive iPhone port.

Despite the low price point, Sumo's new game still manages to include virtually all of the many extras and unlockables that first appeared in the original home console release, making this excellent value for money. There are 25 challenging missions to unlock, three large cups to compete in and an extremely competitive Time Trial mode. As with many racers, you can also simply take to the track in a number of one-off races as well. In short, there's lots and lots to do.

Technically it's highly impressive with stunning visuals, which, while not as busy as those in previous versions, still manage to push Apple's machine. There are occasional frame-rate drops, particularly when there are lots of vehicles onscreen, but it's never at the expense of the gameplay.

It's slightly disappointing, then, that the controls take the shine off what is an otherwise expansive little package. While there's no denying that they're a huge step over similar iPhone racers, they're still far from perfect (particularly when using the slider). Steering assist does go some way to correcting the controls, but the hectic nature of the gameplay, and the constant need to drift and fire power-ups, can sometimes make them a little too fiddly for their own good.

Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing is a fun little racing game that captures all the speed and chaos of its bigger home brother, even if the format it's now on holds it back somewhat.

>> Score **75%**

iOS



» [iOS] This is a surprisingly faithful version of the console racer.



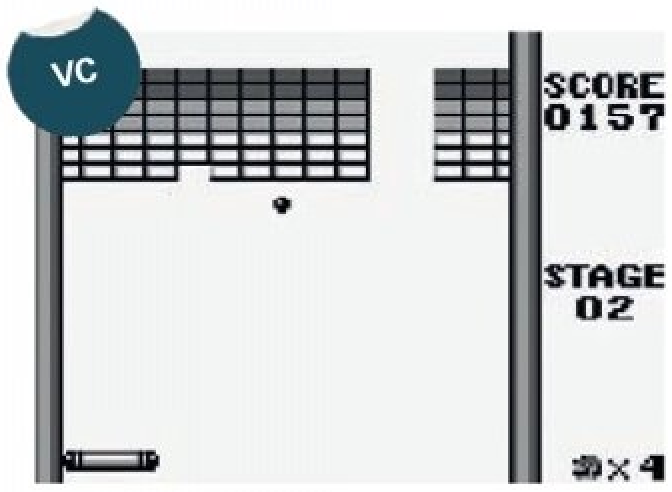
OPINION



While its controls can occasionally let it down, there's no denying that *All-Stars Racing* represents great value for money. The tracks are great fun to race around, while the large amount of unlockables will keep you going for an absolute age.

Darran Jones

VC



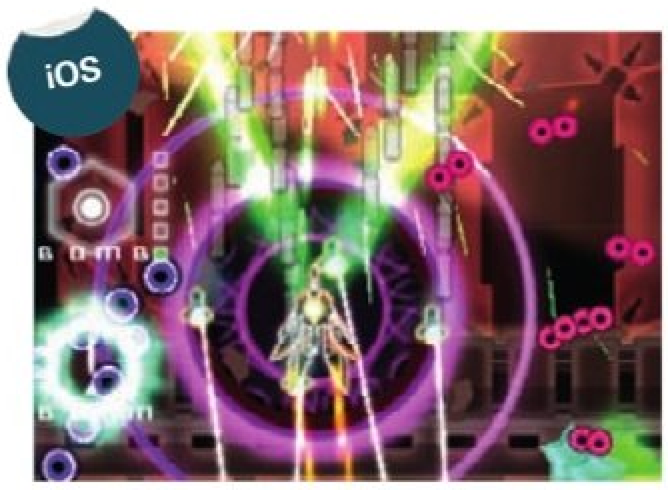
Alleyway

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** £2.70 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Nintendo's *Arkanoid* clone** was pretty piss-poor all the way back in 1989 and, unsurprisingly, time has not been kind to it. The level design is woefully bland, the lack of power-ups make it a real chore to slog through a stage, and it's outclassed by the many similar clones available on iOS for a fraction of the price. Save your money for *Donkey Kong* or *Zelda*.

>> Score **31%**

iOS



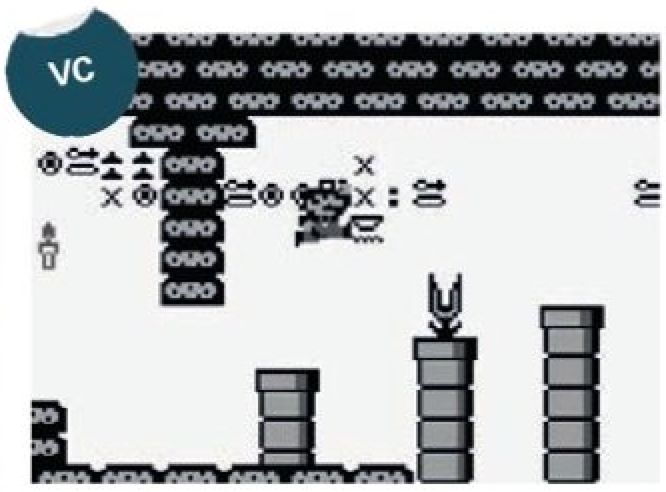
Danmaku Unlimited

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Cave's *Espgaluda II* opened** the gates for bullet-hell shooters on iOS, and there are plenty of challengers to its crown. This effort from Sunny Tam features decent bullet patterns, interesting score mechanics and over-the-top visuals. The controls feel floaty at times and the pace is a little too slow, but it remains a fun shooter.

>> Score **68%**

VC



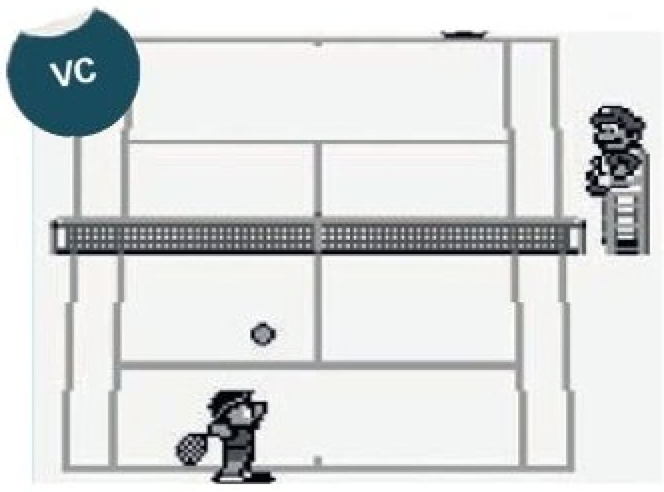
Super Mario Land

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** £3.60 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **We're in two** minds about *Super Mario Land*. On the one hand, it has some nice diversionary levels, teeny tiny sprites that we personally really like the tight, bite-sized levels. On the other hand, the game is insanely easy and can be breezed through in less than two hours, and offers players very little replay value. The *Mario* tax in the price tag is a little cheeky as well.

>> Score **80%**

VC

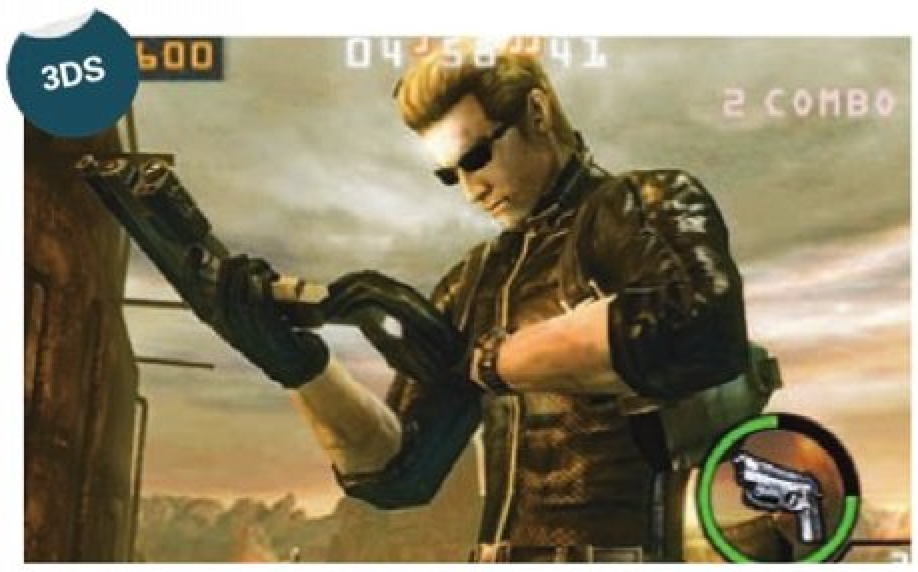


Tennis

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** £2.70 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **We used to** love *Tennis* back in the day, but time has not been kind to the precursor to *Mario Tennis*. Although there are only two buttons you can pull off a surprising variety of shots, while the cartoony sprites are very appealing to look at. Sadly, the lack of challenge and modes along with the sluggish gameplay means that you'll soon be looking elsewhere for your tennis thrills.

>> Score **52%**





» [3DS] Barry Burton doesn't get enough love, so it's good to see him get an outing here.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D

>> **Many gamers are moaning about the inability to delete your save, meaning second hand copies will have everything already unlocked.**

>> **Capcom hasn't announced any new downloads or extras, but we're hoping it might make use of Spot Pass. Even if it's just new costumes.**

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
RESIDENT EVIL 4 (GAMECUBE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
RESIDENT EVIL 5 (PS3)



INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Resident Evil* first rose to prominence on the PlayStation in 1996. It quickly set a new standard for the survival horror genre, coming to define it, and has been scaring audiences ever since. Mercenaries first appeared as an extra in *Resident Evil 4* and has developed a huge following ever since.

CAPCOM'S CULT MULTIPLAYER BLASTER GOES PORTABLE

Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D



Ever since it appeared in *Resident Evil 4*, The Mercenaries has built up an extreme cult following of loyal fans. Capcom has now decided to release the popular mini-game as a standalone release, and the results are interesting, to say the least.

Detached from the lengthy campaigns of *Resident Evil 4* and *5*, *The Mercenaries 3D* initially feels very bare bones, particularly as much of the content has already been seen before in those games. There's no attempt to beef up the action with a storyline, even a nonsensical one; instead you're simply thrown into the small, densely populated maps and barked orders from an unseen instructor.

Early chapters do little more than introduce you to *The Mercenaries'* foes, combat tricks and handful of new play mechanics, but as you start relearning the maps – many of them are cut down from their console versions – and unlocking the additional characters, it soon all starts to slot into place.

One of the biggest improvements over previous offerings is the ability to reload on the run. It sounds a slight, trivial thing, but when you're surrounded by slavering hordes, you'll be grateful for the safety it offers you. It's also now possible to run and strafe, although it's fairly cumbersome to use, resulting in greatly reduced speed. Other changes will be more noticeable to long-term players, as characters feature different attacks and weapon loadouts to experiment with.

Unlockables have always been a big part of *The Mercenaries*, and they're ably represented here with five additional characters, including fan favourite Barry Burton, and secondary outfits to be earned. Skills are like perks, which can be levelled up with repeated use, and many of the levels can be played locally or online with a friend. There's a significant amount of difference in each character to add longevity to what is a relatively short game – you can unlock all the missions in around six hours – but the addictive nature of the leaderboards really does keep pulling you back.

Even when you consider the nature of score-attack games, there's no denying that *The Mercenaries 3D* feels very light on content, particularly as many of the maps are already recycled. Visually it can annoy as well, with rather choppy action when enemies are far away from you. Finally, foes will often respawn in the distance and stand still until you approach, making them very easy to pick off to keep your multiplier high. It's fortunate for Capcom, then, that the core gameplay that surrounds the game is just so much fun to play.

OPINION



The combat system feels solid, and the tight gameplay of previous Mercenaries modes is as addictive as ever. But I was surprised by the lack of real meat in the game. I expected Capcom to have been working overtime to make this feel like a more complete package.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

The lack of content is rather frustrating, but the genuinely excellent combat mechanics and addictive nature of the high-score tables mean that *The Mercenaries 3D* still offers a surprising amount of replay value.

>> **Score 76%**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



In the review of Hyper Viper a few issues back, I grumbled that the game would create impossible situations. Apparently it doesn't, because there's an undocumented way out – consuming a special mushroom allows the snake to eat a rock for a limited time. Today's lesson for developers is that radical changes to the gameplay mechanics need to be documented rather than hoping that players find them unassisted!

JIM SLIM

HOW TO GET A HEAD IN BUSINESS



» [C64] Burying the hatchet.







» **FORMAT:** C64
» **DEVELOPED BY:** PROTOVISION
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/JIM-SLIM
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** 20 EUROS EXC P&P

Programmer Wim Taymans only has the one released C64 game to his credit – a conversion of *Puffy's Saga* for Ubisoft – but around the same time it was written he was working on a second release called *The Adventures Of Jim Slim In Dragonland*, a technical tour de force featuring detailed, colourful graphics that utilised routines usually reserved for demos to scroll at speed. It's taken two decades for that game to be finished and the job had to be picked up by long-serving C64 publisher Protovision, but Wim finally has his second credit!

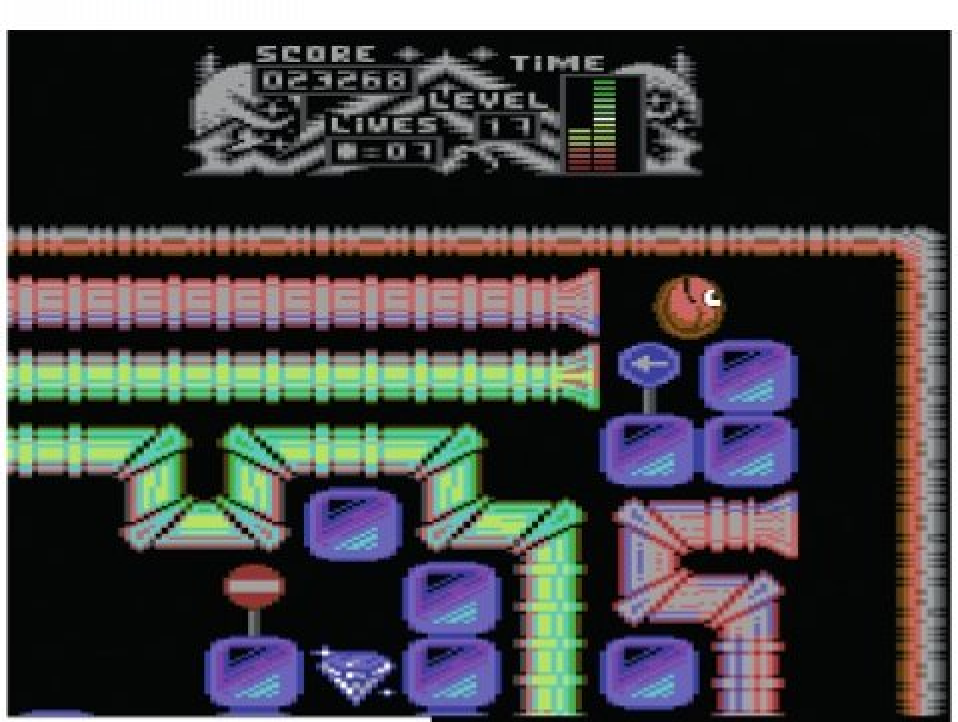
The manual talks of a demon named Gothar who has taken over his entire planet except for one tiny parcel of land, the kingdom of Blizland, which is watched over by a magical skull and remains untouched… or at least it *was* watched over, as Gothar's henchmen have just snatched this slightly gruesome artefact. Jim Slim, a typically spherical inhabitant of Blizland, has been chosen by the kingdom's elders to return the skull to its rightful place, and Gothar has also inadvertently lit a fire under our hero by kidnapping his girlfriend Candy.

The stages are built from tiles; left or right on the joystick will make Jim roll horizontally from tile to tile, while pushing upwards launches him a tile into the air. What makes the controls unusual is that, if the stick is moved horizontally while Jim is airborne, he'll alternate between rolling horizontally in mid-air and dropping one tile at a time, looking like he's rolling down an invisible staircase in the process. The movement might initially feel and indeed look rather odd, but after a bit of practice it's easy enough to use and makes the process of manoeuvring through hazards easier by significantly reducing the margin of error.

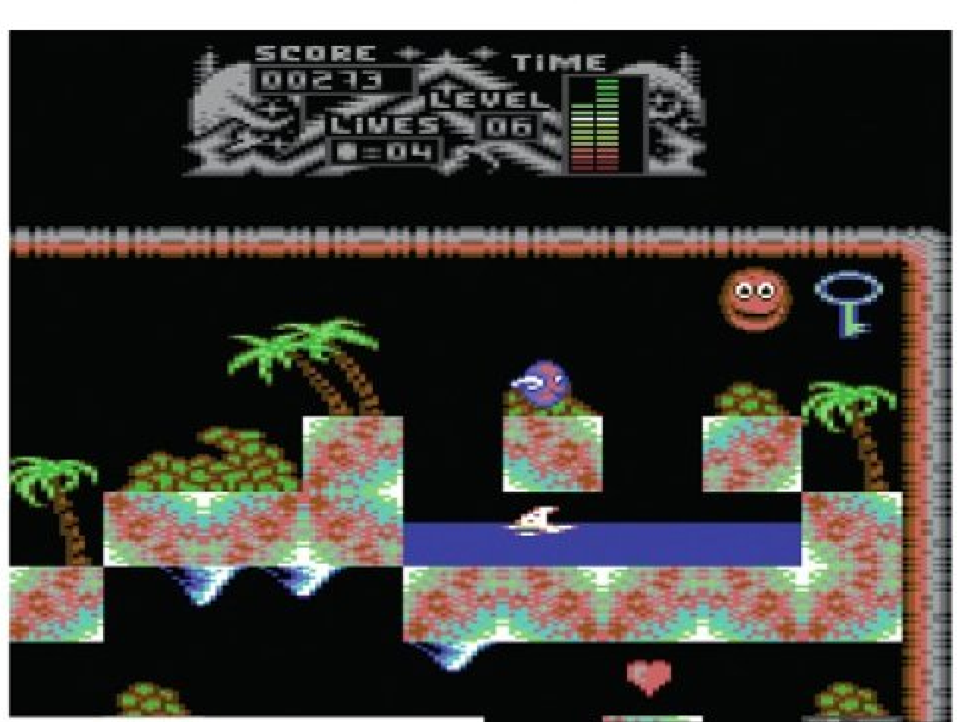
There are items around the map to aid Jim too; along with springboards that augment his jumping to the point of being able to leap the entire play area in a single bound, there are gems and money bags to collect for point, time and life bonuses, and throwing stars that can be used against enemies blocking his path to the exit. Some of the levels also contain teleporters or networks of piping, both of which transport our hero to another part of the current stage.

Potential buyers should be aware that, along with requiring a disk drive and PAL Commodore 64 to run, *Jim Slim* utilises a technique originally pioneered by demo coders called AGSP for its high-speed, colourful scrolling. Some C64s can't handle AGSP and therefore can't run the game, so Protovision is advising potential purchasers to download the preview from its website in order to test their machines beforehand. The 20 euro price tag seems a little steep, but that does get 15 challenging worlds, each housing three levels to keep players occupied, and it arrives with a manual and wrapped in a plastic case not much smaller than a telephone directory.

91%



» [C64] Finding the stage to be draining.



» [C64] We're all going on a summer holiday.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

CHOPPER DROP

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL JENKINSON » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CHOPPER-DROP » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Spectrum] It's really crate to be here.

Life as a helicopter pilot isn't all glamour and ferrying footballers around. In fact, the only work going at the moment is as a glorified crane, moving shipping containers onto the backs of waiting lorries. Still, it isn't all bad news because, if you prove yourself worthy by working your way up through the ranks, there's always a chance you'll get a job working for Sinclair Research, hefting around crates containing Spectrums, Microdrives or perhaps even C5s!

The 24 work areas are situated in a mixture of locations, including building sites, factories, countryside and the docks, and each has four crates dotted around that will need loading. Only one crate can be moved at a time, and if seconds are wasted when loading, colliding with the backgrounds, or bumping into blimps, seagulls and zeppelins, a P45 will be in the post and your chance to work for Sir Clive lost forever.

85%

ROBOTS

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** MICHEL D'ALGER
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MSXDEV-2011-STATUS » **PRICE:** FREE

There's nothing worse than a robot revolution, certainly not for the remaining humans who find themselves unarmed and surrounded by menacing machines. Thankfully, their programming is buggy and they'll only take a step towards a human whenever they detect it moving. Touching a mechanoid is immediately fatal, but robot-on-robot collisions turn both units into a pile of twisted scrap, which can be used to ensnare more of their kind.

Robots is like a turn-based version of *Robotron: 2084* but without any guns; each level starts with the player in the middle of a randomly generated field of droids, needing to cause as many pile-ups as possible before risking the use of a handy random teleportation device that could save or splatter its user. The gameplay is showing its age but can still be challenging, addictive and frustrating in equal measure.

54%

» [MSX] Extermin… sorry, wrong game!





» [Atari 8-bit] Egged on towards the girl.



DINO

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** GONZO
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DINO-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

Rawr! Dino is hungry and running through his prehistoric world in search of food, with pterodactyl drumsticks and helpless women tied to stakes on the menu. But stealing the humans' food – and, indeed, some of the humans – was never going to happen without reprisals, so there will be flying clubs and huge eggs rolling along the ground to duck under and leap over respectively.

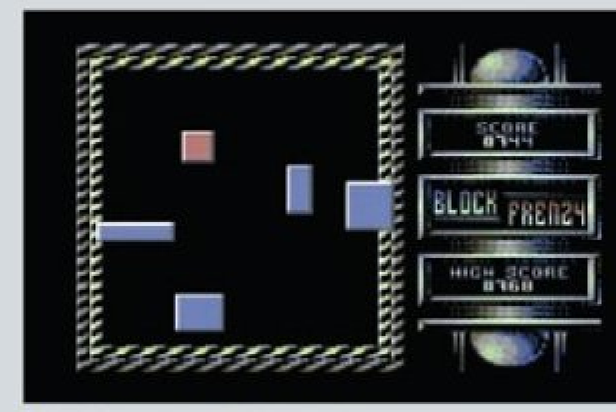
That's all there is to *Dino* really because, despite the scrolling background, it just doesn't give a sense of actually getting anywhere; there are just the two hazards to avoid and a couple of snacks to grab, so the entire game is simply waiting near the middle for something to appear, lunging for it in the gaps between hazards.

The graphics are reasonable, with some nice animation and decent music, but there's no variety there to prevent boredom from setting in.

37%

WHAT'S BREWING?

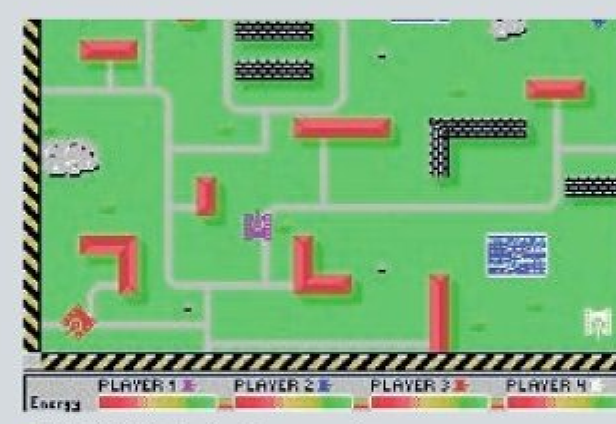
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [C64] A previous RGCD cartridge game.

>> Competition 1

James Monkman, the head of recently regenerated indie and homebrew website RGCD, is a huge fan of C64 cartridge games but feels there aren't enough of them out there… so he's encouraging development of more by holding a competition. The rules in full are at **kikstart.eu/rgcd-c64-cart**, and reading through the other posts reveals that six brave warriors have already stepped forward to test their programming might.



» [MSX] M-Tanks for the memories…

>> Competition 2

The 2011 MSXdev competition is under way, with two completed and six in-progress games already announced, including *Robots*, which is on this very page. We always note the start of the MSXdev contest because there are invariably decent games released for it. Releases are made available as soon as they're completed, so keep an eye on **kikstart.eu/msxdev-2011** to grab them.



» [C64] This game wants to be on other machines.

>> Competition 3 – sort of

Finally, over at Format War there's been an open challenge to convert a C64 shoot-'em-up called *Edge Grinder* – developed by a reviewer not a million miles away with graphics by remaker extraordinaire Smila – to other 8-bits. RGCD will be offering the C64 version on cartridge soon, and there are already Amstrad CPC, Atari 7800 and Atari 8-bit versions in various states of development. **kikstart.eu/edge-grinder**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'SBREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> Going Dutch

There's a lot of competition news this month! The shortlist for the 2011 Creative Game Challenge, the second annual competition for Dutch students arranged by Utrecht University, where GameMaker developer Mark Overmars is based, have been announced. The theme for the competition this time was water. Judging took place at the end of June, and we've got a link to a post over at Game Maker Blog secreted behind **kikstart.eu/2011-creative**, which has more information and direct links to all of the 20 games that made it through to the finals.



>> There's snow business

Currently in closed beta is *Joe Snow*, a platform-based collect-'em-up that takes the design from the 1991 DOS game of the same name and gives it an overhaul, changing the titular Joe from a featureless snowball into a cute snowball with feet in the process. **kikstart.eu/joe-snow** links to the official web page while **kikstart.eu/joe-snow-trailer** will head over to YouTube for the preview video that developer Acoders has posted.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Croco Magneto.**

THE PLAYER TAKES control of a radiation-eating blue ball that constantly bounces to and fro horizontally, changing its vertical position in order to guide it towards radiated blocks in this Amstrad CPC conversion. The aim is to decontaminate the play area while avoiding the deadly green blobs. **kikstart.eu/croco-magneto**

OTHER GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .





AKANE THE KUNOICHI

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/AKANE

A kunoichi ninja called Akane has a problem in her life – she's secretly in love with master samurai Goro, the man who has been training her for untold years, who, along with being oblivious to her affections, has just been taken prisoner by the despicable Hiromi and her minions. None of Goro's other admirers are up to saving him, so Akane must gather up her kunais and head into Hiromi's realm. Saving her master will be tough, but so is Akane.

This rescue mission takes place in a 2D platforming environment with a very 16-bit look and feel going on. Akane can run and jump her way through the detailed stages, slinging blades at enemies, dodging their returned fire and, when necessary, gripping the walls to either slide down or wall jump up to otherwise inaccessible areas.

The fastest route to the end of a stage isn't necessarily the best one to take, with more thorough exploration rewarded with extra time, top-ups for the life bar, power-ups that increase the number of kunais that can be thrown simultaneously, and three mystical lost kimonos. Akane only has one life but can take four hits before she dies and, although no limit is imposed on the number of attempts, each stage must be completed without keeling over before the next is unlocked.

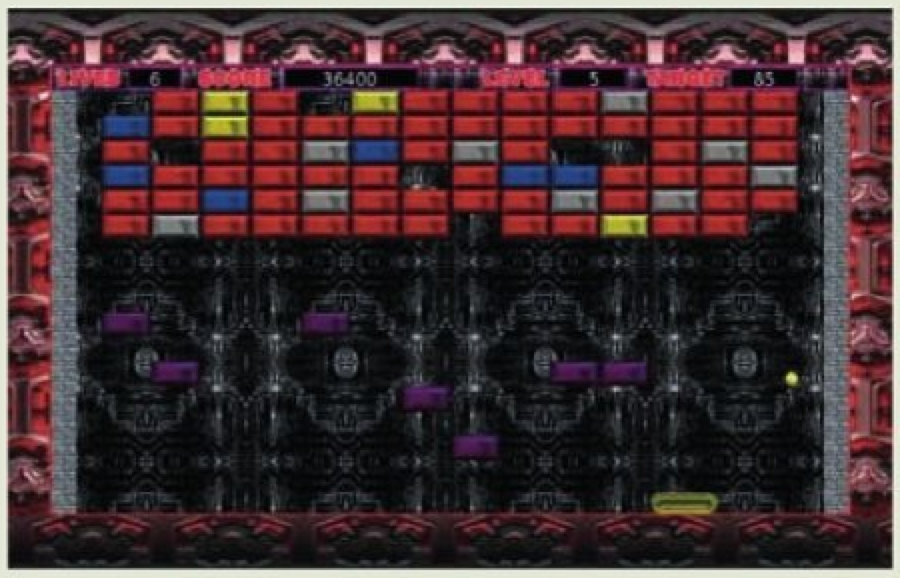


INNOQUOUS 4

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/INNOQUOUS-4

***Innoquous 4* is** a game all about gravity; the player's ball must be rolled and jumped through mazes of blocks, rotating blades, moving walkways and other hazards familiar from other platform games, but the arrows dotted about the level can alter things drastically because they cause the play area to rotate around the ball, changing which way is currently down in the process.

There are 75 brain-bending levels requiring logic and dexterity that can be worked through in order or dipped into from the menu, and the game offers six modes of play, including a speed run and the rather cute 'bunny hunt' option where, along with reaching the exit, a caged rabbit must be freed along the way to completion.



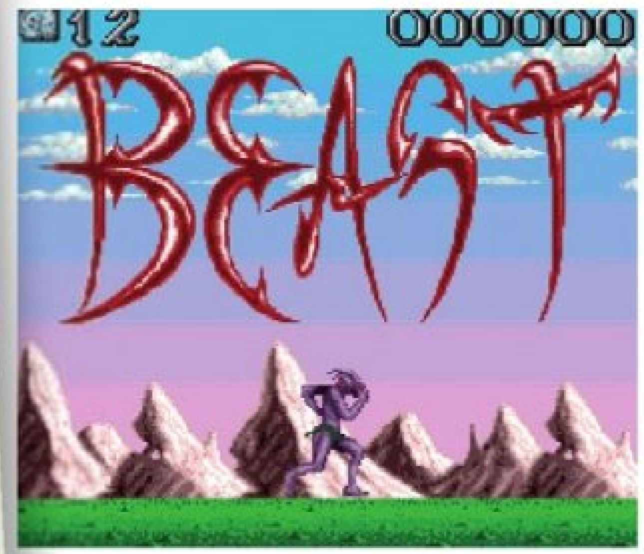
10 AMAZINGLY AWFUL GAMES

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/AMAZINGLY-AWFUL

10 Amazingly Awful Games is a compilation containing… well, ten games. Most are simple clones of retro games, although *Revenge Of The Blocks* is worthy of note for taking the *Breakout* formula and shaking it up by teaching some of the bricks to fire and releasing new balls from the player's paddle on a regular basis. And then there's the weirdness of *Hungry Hungry Toilets*, where up to four lavatories compete to grab oranges.

The majority of the games are more mediocre than downright awful and, as with Firebird's 'classic' *Don't Buy This*, there's some simple but perverse pleasure to be found in most of them that wouldn't be there if they were sold as singles.







» [Plus/4] *Xeo3*, taking its time getting here but looking good!

HOMEBREW HEROES

With a list of credits including classics such as Lemmings and Blood Money, Mike Dailly can safely be described as an industry veteran. But, while his day job is programming for YoYo Games, he still finds time to write 8-bit code occasionally and, indeed, to answer questions

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What originally got you into developing games?

Mike Dailly: I started writing games way back in 1984. Although I was just interested in making a ZX81 do something, that quickly evolved into actually writing games. The fact that most games were written by folk only a few years older was also a huge pull, as I kept thinking I could get rich doing this! No joy in that department here yet…

RG: You've worked with an impressive number of platforms. Are there any that have stood out?

MD: There have been a few, and I've enjoyed some for very different reasons.

The C64 was great to work with, but when I got my PC, it was a dream setup. My compilation time went from 20 minutes in some cases, down to around a second, and a debugger I could actually use.

The TG16 was both good and bad. The console and development kit were beautiful to work with, but the software was so bad that I rewrote most if it. It was such a fast little thing; seven times faster than a C64!

The SNES was also a nice little machine, using a 16-bit chip.

I've had great fun on the PlayStation when I created my own dev kit using an Action Replay, and hooked it into the official Sony software. I also loved doing almost the same to the PS2; I miss the days where you could touch the hardware directly.

RG: Looking at your CV, there's a lot of utility programming in there. Which is more interesting to you, tools or games?

MD: Each have their own rewards, I guess. Making games is great fun, particularly at the end where you just get to tinker. However, some dedicated tools can be good fun as well, particularly ones that deal directly with hardware. Writing a remote debugger is always fun, for example.

RG: On the subject of utilities, how did you become involved with GameMaker?

MD: A friend put me in touch with Sandy Duncan, as he was interested in porting parts of the program to the PSP. I was looking for some freelance work at the time and porting to the PSP sounded like fun.

HIGH FIVE

The classic games that Mike can't live without

1. **Lemmings DS (Nintendo DS)** Worked so well. Pity it could never be legal.
2. **Emulators (various platforms)** I love old computer emulators on handhelds!
3. **madnessMAD-NESSmadness (PC)** More an indie game, but I love the simplicity of the tech.
4. **Pixelry (PC)** A reto indie game. Great-looking chunky graphics and fun gameplay.
5. **Joffa Smith** Almost anything by this awesome coder. Sadly missed. RIP.

After talking with Sandy, it looked like YoYo Games could be something special, so I roped in Russell Kay and we started to play with it. After about nine months freelance, we started working for YoYo Games full-time, and have been there for just over a year. We've done more porting to iPhone, iPad and Android and some nice updates for GameMaker – although Russell and I hate Pascal with a passion! YoYo Games is a fab place to work, and the stuff we're doing makes it a joy to go in every day.

RG: Can you tell us about what you're working on at the moment?

MD: We've just finished a new update for GameMaker, which brings in some much-needed speed to the 3D. While still not great, it's now very usable. We're also just starting to write a new GameMaker, specifically for the web via WebGL/HTML5. This will be great fun, and it's really exciting to be at the cutting edge again.

RG: Who are your programming heroes?

MD: Andrew Braybrook in the old days for sure; his programming diaries were awesome. John Carmack has done some pretty impressive tech in his day. I've actually been more impressed by folk I've worked with over the years, though, particularly the early DMA Design guys.

RG: What advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?

MD: The tools out there are amazing now, so there really is no excuse. From using a PC and writing games to building an entire computer yourself, there's help at hand!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

DAVID FINALLY PLAYS OCARINA

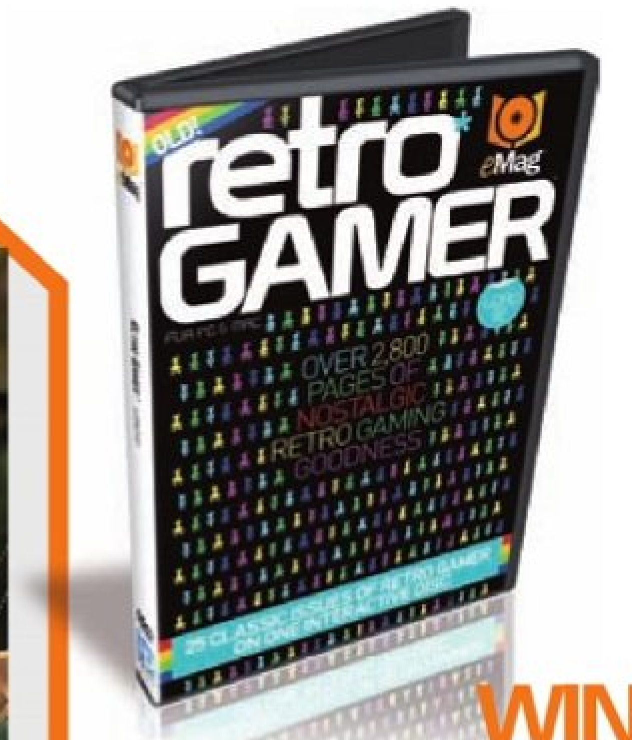


Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to say a big thank you for your recent *Zelda* issue. I've never played *Ocarina Of Time* before, or any *Zelda* game for that matter, but after reading your coverage and Darran's glowing review of the 3DS version last month, I decided to pick up a copy to see what all the fuss was about. I wasn't disappointed. Not only does it look stunning for a 13-year-old game, but it's one of the best-looking games on the 3DS. The story and the world has instantly grabbed me – I haven't been able to put it down. I just wanted to say thank you for turning me on to this great game and keep up the sterling work with the magazine each month. It's the only games magazine I read.

David Tress

We know there were some readers who felt we went a bit overboard with all the *Zelda* coverage in issue 90, but we felt it would have been pretty remiss of us to ignore such a massive franchise celebrating its 25th anniversary with a new version of arguably its best entry. Those readers who did feel put out by all the coverage should worry not, as we won't be doing anything else on the series for a long while – unless, of course, we can finally persuade Mr Miyamoto to chat to us. Glad to hear that the feature persuaded you to pick up what is a fantastic game. Enjoy finishing it; it's got a cracking finale.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

ULTIMAGAZINE

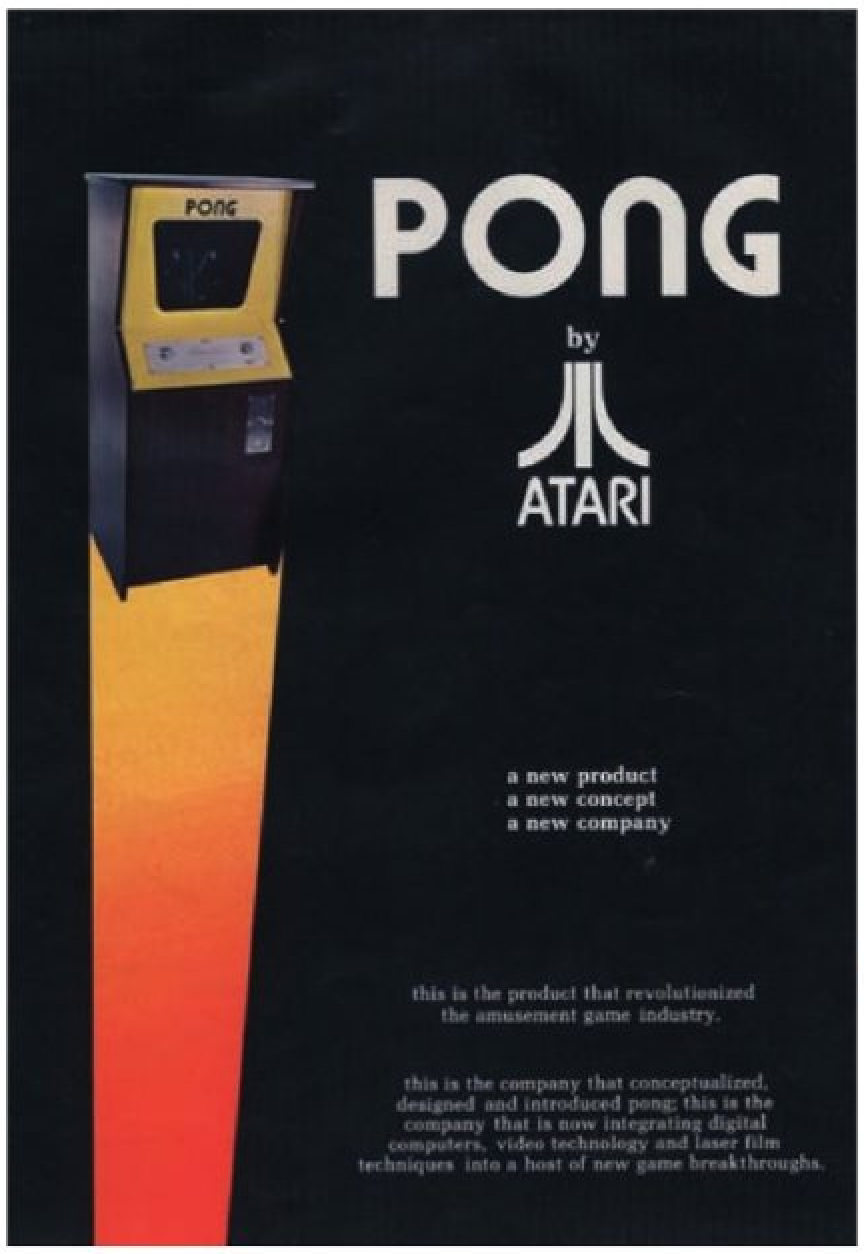
Dear Sir/Madam,

I discovered your magazine in a train station newsstand earlier this month and I'm amazed (and ashamed!) that I've not noticed it before. I've just procured a handful of back issues that cover some of my favourite games from the golden age of gaming, but I've not found any that cover the *Ultima* series, save issue 68, which has an interview with Richard Garriott. Is this a game series that has not been covered yet or have I missed it? I appreciate that the latter titles of the series were PC only, but the early games we ported to most every computer system going, with the PC-port often last. In fact, I purchased the Atari version of *Ultima IV* on eBay earlier this week, to me the series' finest outing. I hope if you haven't yet covered it that you do so soon. Looking forward to the next issue!

Regards,

Mike Fowler

We actually covered the entire *Ultima* series inside the very issue you mention. As well as an in-depth chat with Lord British himself, the article featured a complete history of the *Ultima* series, beginning with insight on *Akalabeth* (*Ultima 0*) and ending with *Ultima IX*. If you find yourself struggling to secure a back issue and you own an iPhone or iPad, you can now purchase back issues from the App Store.



» **We can't imagine motion controls will spell the end of control pads. Can you honestly imagine playing a game of ping pong using your hands? Actually, hang on…**

IT'S ALL GETTING A BIT MOTION-ABLE

Hello Retro Gamer,

I had a worrying thought the other day and was wondering your take on the subject. With new motion-control and touch-screen devices like the iPad, PlayStation Move and Kinect, do you think that using the joypad will become the ultimate retro act of gaming in years to come?

I am not a fan of the motion sensor controls as I feel that it eliminates a load of skill and luck that makes games what they are. I know games like *Missile Command* and *Smash TV* had a different system of control, but with gaming more accepted and more family-based I can see more gimmick and motion sensor games in the future. Is this at the expense of the regular/hardcore



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



» YOUTUBE UPDATE

IN ADDITION TO collecting for his SNES, Darran's been picking up some cracking board games. The popular pastime gets an unfair rap in the UK, so visit Darran's channel where you'll be able to find talks and reviews of some of his favourites in addition to all the usual retro games.

gamer? I would hate to think that joypads would one day become obsolete or retro, but the needs of the many, I fear, may outnumber the needs of the few.

Worried at night,

Barry Walsh

Since the very beginning of videogames, controls have played a significant part in their success, and in some cases defined them too – paddle controls in *Pong*, the trackball in *Missile Command*. Add to this point that motion controls, we feel, will simply never be able to beat the responsiveness of a tangible control scheme, which is why the biggest game franchises have yet to fully embrace them in any meaningful way, and we don't suppose that things will change any time soon. Stop worrying and get some sleep.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

First off, I just have to say that I love the magazine, so much so that I'm trying to get back issues off eBay when I can. But why does your quality magazine go for so much money on eBay? The *Super Mario Bros* celebration issue in particular trades hands for a small fortune.

Anyway, the real reason for me writing to you is to ask whether you have ever done a collector's guide for the NES and Super Nintendo. I've had these systems for ages and I'm now starting to collect for them, so a guide on them would be massively useful. Also, as a fan of both the *Resident Evil* and *WipEout* games, can I ask if you have ever done an article on these series?

Anyway, **Retro Gamer** is a top magazine, and it shows that it's being put together by people who care about this area, so please don't change any time soon.

Thanks,

Adrian

It always surprises us when we see back issues of RG going for loads of money, and our special covers are understandably always the most collectable. We have yet to run a Collector's Corner feature on the NES, but you'll be pleased to hear that next month we are featuring the Super Nintendo. Regarding *Resident Evil* and *WipEout*, we've run making of features about both of those games. You'll find them in issues 61 and 35 respectively.

FANJO-KAZOOIE

Hi,

I would like to draw your attention to a fan game I've made, as I think it would be of real interest to your readers. The game is called *Banjo-Threeie: Chapters*, is designed on the retro theme of *Banjo-Kazooie* for the N64, and is a fan's tribute to a retro classic. The game is a non-profit game and has all the right trademarks covered in the game and website credits. It's currently on the front page of **www.therwp.com**, **simplyrare.wordpress.com** and **www.rarewarecentral.com**, so please take a look and tell us what you think.

Kind regards,

Dan

Hi, Dan. Thanks for sending us details about your homebrew game. We booted »

> **"It was all going swimmingly until I lobbed a grenade at my mate's tank"**

RETRODATE PROFILE



Name:	Jack Poole-Fuste
Joined:	20 April 2011
Location:	Mallaig
Occupation:	Student
Website:	Not given
Fave Games System:	GBA & PSone



» [PC] We were impressed with the clear amount of passion and effort that went into Dan's *Banjo-Kazooie* sequel. If you're a fan of the series be sure to check it out.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 530



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: COLUMNS

Why I picked it: I fancied playing a great puzzler. I couldn't find one, though, so I played *Columns*.

Handy tip: Insert matchsticks into your eyes to stop yourself from falling asleep. If that fails, use the Ludovico technique to hold them in place.



High Score: 32,700



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: MAG MAX

Why I picked it: The CPC version was a bit of a conversion turd, if my memory serves, and I wanted to see if the original arcade game was any better.

Handy tip: The surface sections do seem to be easier to navigate than the subterranean.



High Score: 49,250



JASON

CHOSEN GAME: KILLER COBRA (CPC)

Why I picked it: It's like playing *Super Cobra* but with the fast-forward key held down!

Handy tip: Keep forward where possible to leave yourself reaction time, and try to memorise the levels.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your fondest 8-bit memory?

Fred83
Spectrum 128k with its monochrome games that fully loaded in a single load!

thevulture
Getting Atari 8-bit tape games to load – no mean feat. Seeing *Rescue On Fractalus!* running on Atari 8-bit. The C64 SID chip and the wonders produced on it by Hubbard, Follin, etc. 8-bit speech (*Beach Head II*, *Slimey's Mine*).

Morkin
Am I allowed to say the beauty of C90 cassettes? If not, getting a Spectrum for Christmas – was completely gobsmacked as it was a total surprise – and being introduced to the wonder of *Crash* magazine, which started my love affair of gaming magazines, which continues to this day with **Retro Gamer**.

ncf1
Zzap! Christmas editions got me excited. Eagerly anticipating games to load on my C64 that I'd played in the arcade was terribly exciting.

ipmarks
Loading up *Knight Lore* for the first time. I hadn't read any reviews, just bought it on the strength of previous Ultimate games and the cool box art. I think my jaw hit the floor. The sheer joy of being able to move tables around was disproportionately exciting to me at the time. I still love that game to this day, and it still makes me tingle with happy memories.

Bub&Bob
WHSmiths, mid-Eighties, in Wood Green Shopping City. Commodore 64 on display.
10 Print "Great Big Tits";
20 Goto 10
Run
Hiding around the corner

Seadog74
Reading a review of a game in *Amstrad Action* that wasn't a Speccy port

IronMaidenRule
The first time I played *Barbarian*, it was the most fantastic moment any seven-year-old could have had! It was on a C90, so I didn't know about the cover art then. That may have been more fantastic.

Sputryk
The freshness of it all. For the first few years on buying my Speccy+, relishing the prospect of each new gaming purchase, and now basking in contentment at owning and still enjoying classic games and gaming experiences. Such feelings for me no longer exist for the modern world of gaming – it isn't fresh and there is no wonderment.

Fishsta
My favourite 8-bit memory was everything about *Your Sinclair*. I've still got the last ever issue, and it still brings a tear to my eye that it has been defaced by having the form for Silica Systems cut out, from which my Amiga was purchased. That and the "Our Work Here Is Done" on the back cover.

joefish
Winding up the entire English department at school after winning the 'English Prize' for my year. It was a book token, which I got to spend, and then return the book for it to be presented by the headmaster in front of all the parents. My choice? *The Complete Spectrum ROM Disassembly* by Dr Ian Logan and Dr Frank O'Hara. I was told it wasn't even a proper book. Ha.

fgasking
Being able to switch on a machine and begin programming straight away from the word go was pretty awesome.

thl
Mine has to be the arrival of the Sega Master System back in summer 1989. One of my brothers got it as a present from the school teacher for gaining 100 per cent full attendance. I was so excited that I witnessed some great arcade conversions, from the likes of *Shinobi*, *Rastan*, and *Space Harrier*. Plus using the Light Phaser for the first time was something special, as it allows me to test my accuracy, especially if you're going hunting in *Safari Hunt* or bringing down troops in *Operation Wolf*.

Rinoa
Waking up one Christmas morning to a NES and spending the rest of the day playing *Super Mario Bros* and *Duck Hunt* with my dad! Also, the amount of time I spent playing *Super Mario Bros 3* and *DuckTales*. What a wonderful system that was – and still is!

kelp7
Best 8-bit memories? All of it. The industry was only just getting started, every new game seemed like a new idea, and genres were forming. I count myself very lucky to have witnessed it first-hand. I even have fond memories of magazine type-in listings

webding
My mum judging if I'd "been playing too long" by whether she could touch my C64's power pack/transformer without getting burns. To be fair to her, she helped me complete my first ever game by having the required timing to nip past the Marshmallow Man at the end of *Ghostbusters*, despite being cack at every other game I owned. Well, I say 'owned'; C90s may have been involved too.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

Wii U

nakamura Certainly the console looks interesting but no idea how it is going to work at the moment. I will keep an eye on announcements. Nintendo badly needs some new IPs, though.

sebadude I think that the Wii U could reinvent gaming again, but I imagine that there will be a unique element of the one special controller with several other regular players, and players taking turns to use the tablet.

AlleyKat The big questions for me are whether the decent level of third-party support actually pans out, which it hasn't for the last few Nintendo home platforms, and whether the online side is up to snuff.

JackBurton-Me I'm not really impressed with this Wii U thing. The controllers look disgraceful and the whole thing smells of gimmick. They're trying to recapture that gimmick factor that got the Wii so many sales.

RIGHT FIRST TIME

Mootown *Monkey Ball* on the GameCube; the resulting sequels just got worse and worse. How the Xbox one turned out so bad is beyond me.

RetroAerosmith *Call Of Duty*. When they started messing with perks it opened the floodgates to willy waving and boosting lobbies. The good old days of *COD2* with everyone's weapon the same throughout the modes were much more satisfying.

Darth Martious *Tomb Raider*. I loved the first one but never got on with the sequels.

thevulture *Power Stone*. Sequel added more but was confusing. Never 'felt' as great as the first.

joefish *Elite II* and *Starglider II* both tried to do too much and exceeded the capabilities of the hardware. Crippling frame rates ruined any chance of gameplay.

BEST SUPERHERO GAMES

pratty *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, which I picked up for the GameCube. An absolute blast to play and loads to do and unlock. Playing this game made me realise just how awesome the Hulk is

paranoid marvin Not a 'real' superhero, but *Redhawk* and *Kwah!* were great games on the Speccy.

killbot *Batman: The Movie* on the Amiga is a bit special, and some people have singled it out as a turning point in the industry moving from 8 to 16-bit. The platformy bits are good too, with a nice *Bionic Commando* mechanic that lets you swing around on a zipline.

StickHead There was a *Jet Set Willy*-style adventure game for the Atari ST called *The Amazing Spider-Man*. I don't think it was well received at the time, probably because most people saw this type of game as old hat.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Duke Nukem* game is the best?

Duke Nukem Forever



Duke Nukem 3D



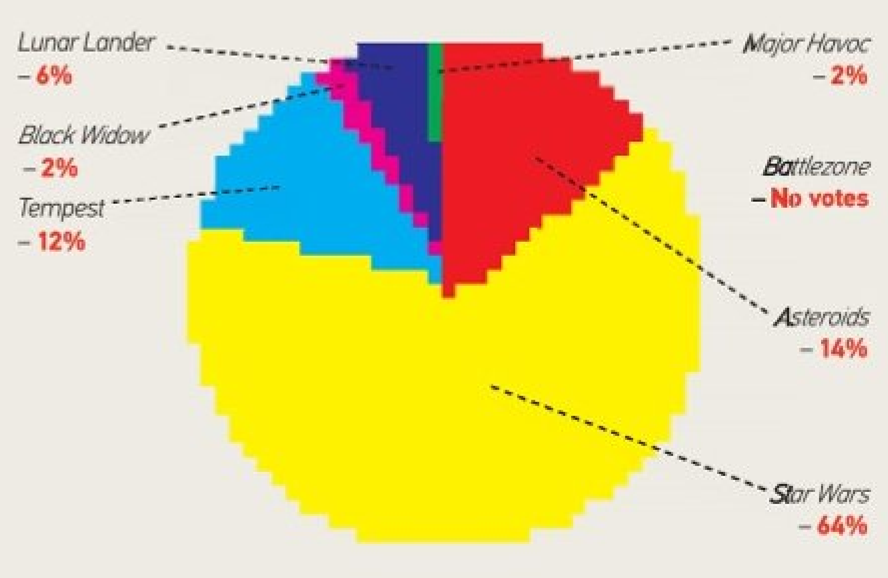
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DigitalDuck
They're both fun FPSs, but I think *Forever* JUST beats *3D* in terms of fun.

Kai
Duke Nukem 3D still is a brilliant piece of software. Period.

HOT TOPIC

Favourite vector arcade game



"*Star Wars*. It captured the spirit of the film, the textures weren't needed due to being in outer space, and the vector graphics just gave it an extra dimension of sci-fi coolness" **– ncf1**

"*Major Havoc*! This game has it all… Funky tunes and effects, *Space Invaders*-style shooting…" **– deadpan666**

it up in the office and enjoyed what we played. You've certainly captured the humour and spirit of the series, and we liked how you seem to have meshed together the gameplay of *Donkey Kong Country* with the world of *Banjo-Kazooie*. Anyway, keep up the great work. We look forward to seeing what you have up your sleeve for remaining chapters.

ENDSHIPS

I felt obliged to write in after reading the shocking letter from Simon last month, who opened his heart up to you after his brother, who might or might not be Matthew Lightbourne, decided to vandalise his copy of *Mario Party 3* by taking a poo on it. Personally I have never really been a fan of any of the *Mario Party* games, but I think what Simon's brother did was particularly odious. But reading his letter reminded me of a similar horrible retro gaming incident that happened to me back in 1989. I had got into a very heated argument with a so-called friend once during an after-school *Ikari Warriors* session on my Spectrum. It was all going swimmingly to begin with until the moment I mistakenly lobbed a grenade at his tank and it blew up. He went ballistic and his personality completely changed in the blink of an eye. He stood up, started shouting at me, and threatened to break up my parents' marriage, saying that when the divorce had gone through he would then marry my mum and become my stepfather. He then told me he would ban me from playing games forever and possibly send me to a boarding school if I didn't do his homework to a standard that would get him into veterinary school. Anyway, his name was Matthew.

Stanley The Bugman

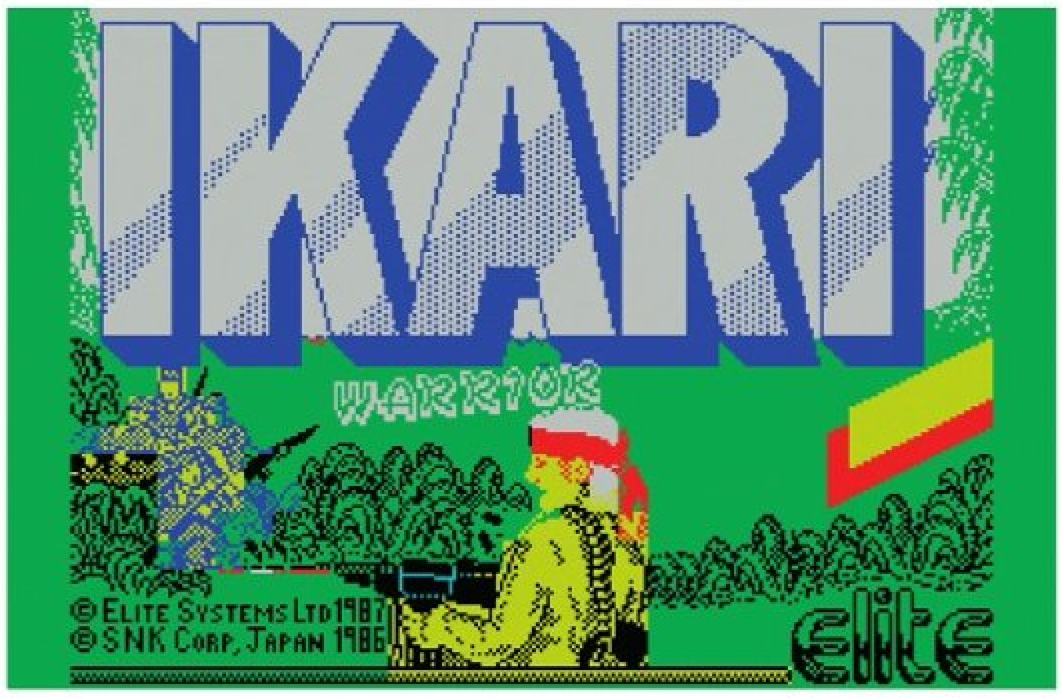
Seriously, whoever it is that keeps sending us these ridiculous letters under different names, please continue to do so.

> "I would hate to think that joypads would one day become obsolete or retro"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Holidaying on land masses

For a portion this month Stuart has been left to man the good ship *Retro Gamer* alone, as both Darran and Kate have been out of the office visiting islands. Kate paid a visit to the Isle of Wight – cleverly opting to visit a few days after its annual musical festival to ensure that Kings of Leon were a safe distance away, while Darran went to the exotic island of Fuerteventura. Not much the swimmer or sunbather, Darran prepared for his trip by purchasing a hefty new battery pack for his 3DS.



[Spectrum] It all went horribly wrong for Stanley after some friendly fire turned unfriendly. He could never bring himself to play *Ikari Warriors* in co-op again.

BROWN-TINTED GLASSES

Dear RG,

I'm an avid reader of your fine mag and have a feature idea that I wanted to tell you about. It's basically an article that looks back at all of those aspects of retro gaming that we're not sorry to see have remained in the past. The kind of topics I was thinking you could include is stuff such as trying in vain to create your own free games through type-ins inside magazines and books, shoddy arcade conversions, game screenshots appearing in old videogame magazines that shared little likeness to the finished game, and, of course, lengthy loading times.

Anyway, I hope you think the feature's got potential. Keep up the good work.

Dave Turner

We like the idea, Dave. Perhaps it would work well as a top 25, as we could then list the options we come up with in a forum poll and let readers vote on what they feel were the worst aspects of gaming in the past. Loading times would secure the top spot, though, surely? We'll certainly give your idea some serious thought.

* CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Magic 2012

After being impressed with *Duels Of The Planeswalkers*, I'm delighted to see that many of my major niggles have been fixed for this update. It's a perfect introduction to one of the world's greatest collectable card games.





STUART

Mortal Kombat

It's not perfect by any stretch, but the next time you have a few mates round, pop this on and you can watch the years fall off everyone. It's puerile, silly, overblown – typical *Mortal Kombat* all the way.





JASON

Portal

With all the *Portal 2* hype and finally getting a PC that can handle Steam, it seemed a good time to revisit *Portal*. It's a prime example of how to make engaging games without a massive budget.

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Imagine Publishing Ltd
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Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net

Magazine team

Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237
Editor in Chief **Rick Porter**
Designer **Kate Logsdon**
Features Editor **Stuart Hunt**
Senior Sub Editor **Mat Hoddy**
Sub Editors **Simon Burr, Olly Dean**
Senior Art Editor **Greg Whitaker**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors
Mike Bevan, Richard Burton, Martyn Carroll, David Crookes, Paul Davies, Paul Drury, Tim Henderson, Jason Kelk, Iain Lee, Damien McFerran, Anne-Claire Pickard, Samuel Roberts

Cover Illustration
Oliver Frey

Photo Studio
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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Advertising Director James Willmott
☎ 01202 586432
james.willmott@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Advertising Sales Executive Madeleine Jones
☎ 01202 586417
madeleine.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk

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Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
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Circulation
Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Group Managing Director Damian Butt
Group Finance & Commercial Director Steven Boyd
Group Creative Director Mark Kendrick

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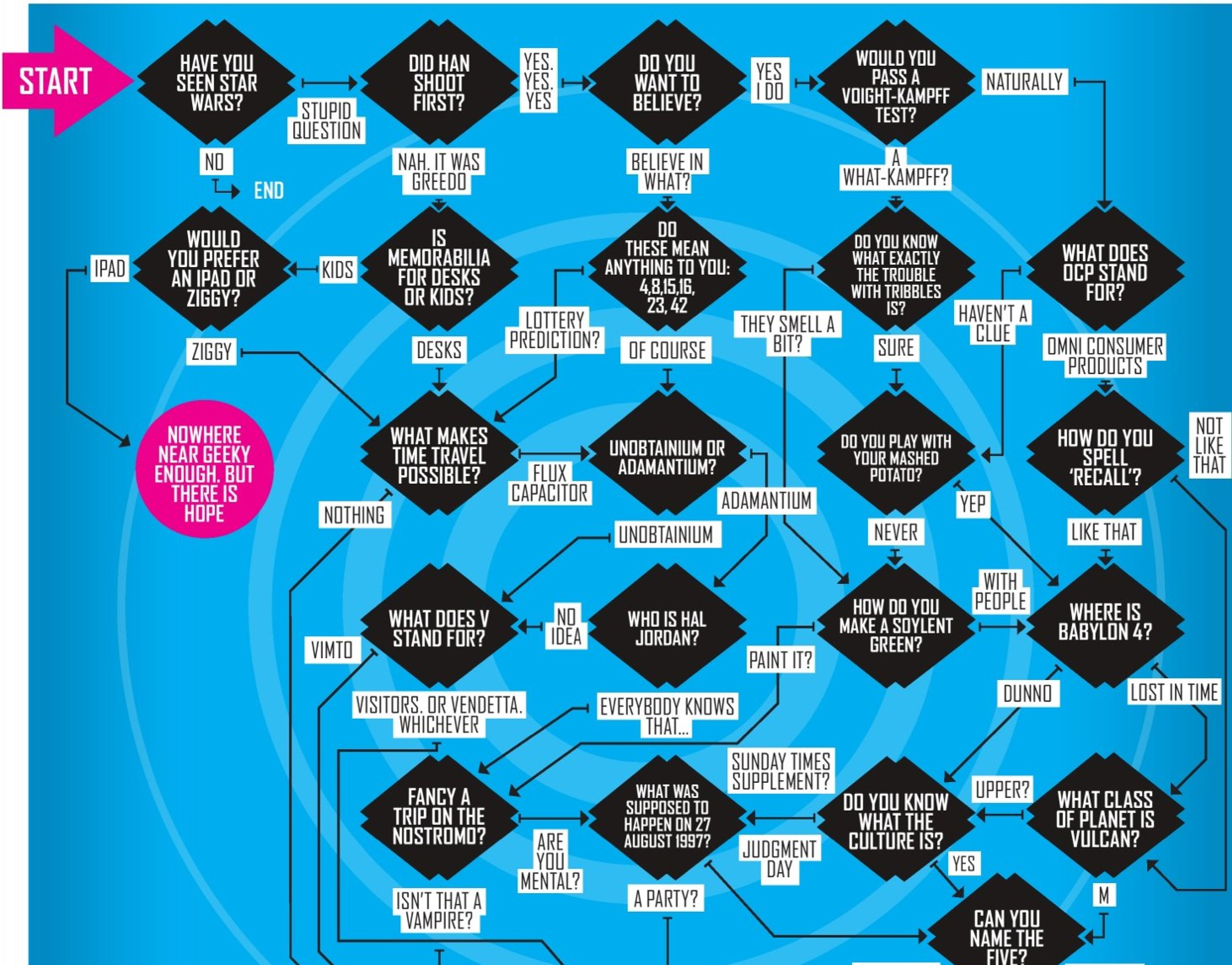
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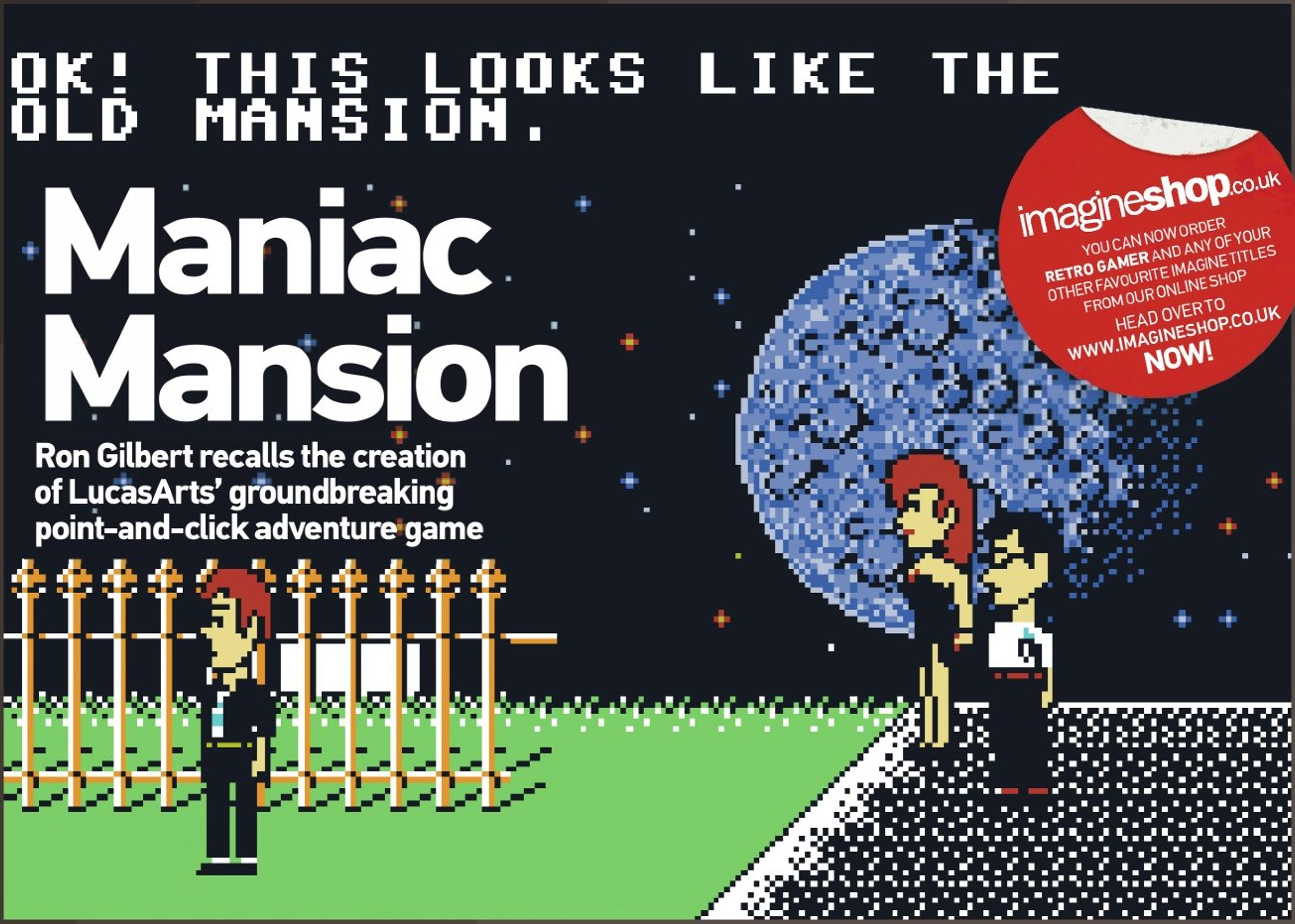
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Maniac Mansion

Ron Gilbert recalls the creation of LucasArts' groundbreaking point-and-click adventure game

ALSO IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Galaga

■ As Namco celebrates *Galaga*'s 30th birthday, we look back at the impact it has had on the shoot-'em-up genre



Super Nintendo

■ Our latest Collector's Guide reveals all the best games and peripherals that no SNES owner should be without



Rastan

■ We chat to the high score veteran of Taito's hit coin-op and the developer tasked with converting it to home systems



Frag Attack

■ To celebrate 15 years of *Quake*, we speak to id Software about the game that changed the FPS genre


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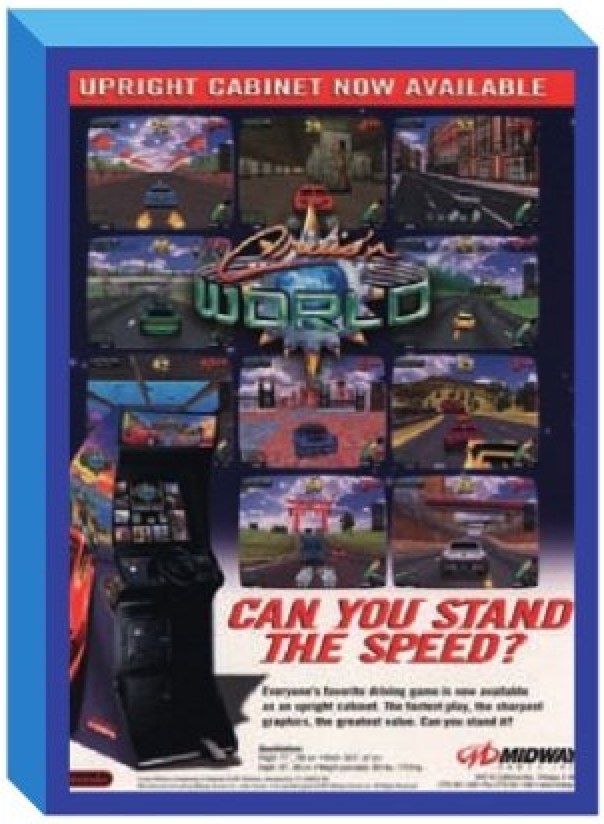

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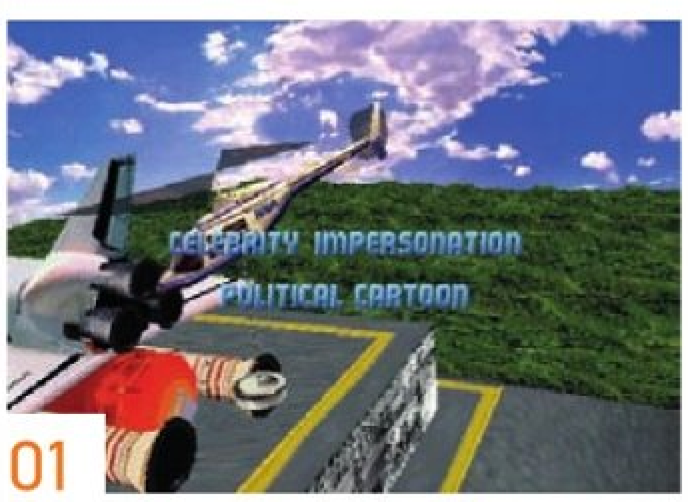

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CRUIS'N WORLD

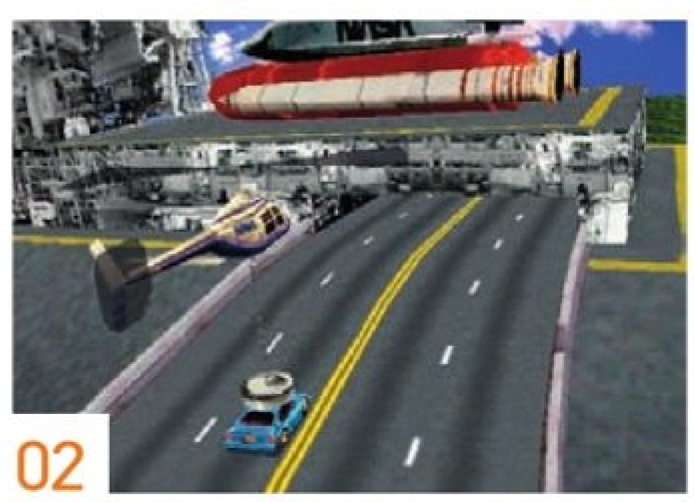


» Headed by Eugene Jarvis, the *Cruis'n* series was a riotous driving franchise that saw players partaking in a point-to-point race against rival cars in various real world-inspired locales. Spawning a series of arcade games, the first game was set entirely in the US, but the sequel took the racing global, before, as its bizarre ending reveals, leaving players stranded in outer space.



01

» *Cruis'n USA* ends on a bizarre political cartoon and so does its sequel, but this one is even more peculiar. First, a chopper with a giant bath plug dangling from it leaves the Kennedy Space Centre. Where on Earth is this going?



02

» Of course, it turns out it isn't going anywhere on Earth. The bath plug is actually a giant magnet, used to grab our vehicle and deposit it inside the opened hatch of the shuttle (of course!). What this has to do with politics we're not sure.



03

» After countdown, the shuttle launches into space, reaches its destination and deposits our car on the surface of the moon. Is Midway hinting where the setting of the next game will be? Sadly not… *Cruis'n Exotica* was set in Vegas.



04

» When you think that this ending couldn't get any sillier, there's more surrealist humour. From out of the black cosmos appears a lunar exploration probe. Landing on the moon, its lid opens to reveal the president bathing with a couple of bikini babes inside.



05

» Eventually, the president and his hot tub are abducted by aliens, sucked up by a flying saucer with tractor beams. A terribly bleak ending to a racing game, we are now left to live out the rest of our days on the moon with five mobile phone salesmen.



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